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Becoming a Young Professional: The Social Organization of Career

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BECOMING A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL:

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CAREER

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

For Hans

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ABSTRACT

BECOMING A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL:

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CAREER

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While careers are often conceptualized as individual paths through occupations - propelled by internal drive and (for the lucky ones) passion - this research takes a more social and political perspective, understanding careers as coordinated by forces external to people and their immediate local settings. In particular this study uncovers ways that imperatives and activities associated with contemporary regional economic development have uneven consequences for young workers depending on socioeconomic status.

For this dissertation I undertook a three-year longitudinal study of a much publicized initiative by top administrators of a state university to entice more college students to remain in that northeast US state to work upon graduation. Using the theoretical framework and methodology of institutional ethnography, a mode of analysis designed to "explore a regime of social policy from the standpoint of those subject to it," (DeVault 2008: 2) this research is anchored in the actual experiences of young students and workers transitioning into careers - potential young professionals. Through extensive observations of the activities of those involved

with the initiative, interviews of business leaders, students, and recent graduates, analysis of initiative documents, as well as analysis of related practical and academic texts, I mapped the complexes of career-related social relations around students and workers that have material consequences on their everyday lives.

According to the leaders of the university initiative "young professionals" – a category applied rather freely - were the creative, energetic, hard workers needed by the state for economic growth. This research investigated the "work" – paid and unpaid - that goes into performing as a "young professional," and reveals the disjunctures between the idealized images of young professionals and their actual lived experiences. It is much easier for some to perform the work of young professionalism than others, given structural inequities in economic, social, and educational structures. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the consequences of these findings, including implications for university professors who work to prepare college students for their future careers.

Despite the prevalence of young professional discourse in the United States, there is very little careers research specifically focused on young professionals and their careers. This research addresses that gap and also adds a needed contextual, longitudinal perspective to that body of management scholarship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING GENERATION NOW

One of the most hopeful things I've seen this year is in my getting to know the young professionals of the state. They are the future of [our state].

- New England higher education administrator (2008)

I lost my job and then my success

But I have a worthless college degree

Welcome to teetering on homelessness

- Lyrics to "Middle Class in the USA," local rap group (2010)

Introduction

One evening in October 2010 I entered an upscale bar located in a former textile mill in a New England city in the Northeastern United States. I was there to celebrate the launch of a website that was the culminating event of Generation Now[1]. Generation Now, which I had been studying for several years, was an initiative created by university leaders several years prior to encourage more young college graduates to stay and work locally.

The old brick walls of the former mill contrasted with dimmed modern light fixtures, a long polished cherry bar and leather-capped bar stools. People in dark suits crowded into the room, drank wine and beer, and helped themselves to the elegant hor d'oeuvers waiters offered

[1] The name of the initiative has been changed.

from trays. As I found a seat at the bar, Gary[2], a young professional I had met several times during my research, stepped up onto the small stage set up in the back of the bar. I swiveled on my stool to face him as he spoke:

> Generation Now started as an idea. The idea that we have to do something about all the young people leaving [our state]. All sorts of people were thinking about this and gathering ideas. We had Generation Now, the nine Young Professionals Networks around the state, a Governor's Task Force, and we all came together to create this new website.
>
> Now when we hear people say it, we have an answer to "there's nothing to do in [our state]" or "there are no jobs in [our state]." We're having a revolution of sorts. We're saying that [our state] is not just to place to come when you have a family; it's a place to start a life. You can launch a career here. You don't just come to [our state] to retire, you come to live. (Fieldnotes, Oct. 2010)

Next, after an introduction from Gary, the mayor of the city stepped up to the podium and spoke about the state's need for more young professionals.

> We need more young professionals in [our city]. We have almost full employment in the city, and I just cut the ribbon on three new businesses this week. I know Gary's company has eight openings, so if you want a job, see Gary (laughs). (Fieldnotes, Oct. 2010)

The mayor stepped down, and a representative from a large bank, one of the state's larger employers, came up to introduce the musical entertainment for the evening – a rap group

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[2] All names have been changed.

specializing in parody songs. The group had written a parody song about the region and created an accompanying video, which had quickly become hugely popular on the internet. Tonight they didn't start with their well-known song, however, but with a new rap about being unemployed. The bar filled with loud thumping bass and voices singing:

I lost my job and then my success

But I have a worthless college degree

Welcome to teetering on homelessness

I need a money back guarantee

Deferred my loans cuz I couldn't pay 'em on time

Look to the future and see the unemployment line (Fieldnotes, Oct. 2010)

The juxtaposition of the mayor's ardent claims that the region's economy was strong with plenty of career opportunities for young workers, and the almost despairing song, about the struggles related to finding a job, starting a career and survival (even with a college education!) brought back a familiar feeling. It was the same disquiet I had been experiencing throughout the years of my research. Now, in the bar, I could see—once again—that what the leaders of the state were saying about local career opportunities was very different from what many students and workers were experiencing.

As I explain in this dissertation, I had been seeing and hearing diverging viewpoints on local job possibilities and careers since early in my research. State leaders spoke about fantastic local work opportunities and potential to build successful careers, while many students and workers I spoke with were struggling to manage debt from paying for higher education and couldn't find jobs. By late 2010, at the end of my research, I knew that the conflicting messages I heard at the bar were not an accident or an aberration. There was a concerted structure of social

relations shaping both the perceptions of local careers and how they were experienced by local workers. The local leaders behind Generation Now who were excited about local careers were not to blame for "ignoring" reality; as I reveal in this dissertation they, like everyone in the state, were caught in systematic social relations shaping the ways they understand local circumstances and imperatives.

I came to this understanding of Generation Now through a three-year inquiry using an institutional ethnographic research approach (Smith, 1987; 1999; 2005). This research approach borrows from Marxism, feminism and ethnomethodology and led me to explore "'how things work' from the standpoint of those who live the everyday experience" (Rankin & Campbell, 2006: 16). Institutional ethnographers start from the experience of people and map complexes of social relations around them that have material consequences on their everyday lives. Dorothy Smith introduced the concept of institutional ethnography, and called the larger discourses and structures that shape everyday actions "relations of ruling" as they tend to supersede individuality and autonomy.

Connecting "Micro" Actions to "Macro" Structures through Institutional Ethnography

My personal interest in young workers and the transition from college into career originated while I was working for a large information technology company in a major city. Just out of college, my job entailed finding other workers for my company's many open positions. Still trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, I was curious about the young people I was interviewing and hiring. What were their histories and personal stories? How had they ended up in the city, and why had they decided to apply to work for a technology company? I hadn't had a plan, and had seemingly stumbled into my job. Were other young workers in the same situation? Are the jobs we end up in arbitrary, or is there a pattern, some way to make sense of

those early work years – an experience that, to me, felt so random and chaotic? How can we better understand the confusing transition from college to career?

Years later, I found myself on a quest to wrangle these vague questions into a dissertation topic. One morning, listening to an interview program on a New England public radio station, I heard a state university administrator discussing his new plan for enticing more young people to stay in his state after graduation. Generation Now, as he had named the program, would increase the percentage of local college graduates who remained in the state after graduation. I contacted the administrator, and was able to gain access as a participant-observer in Generation Now.

Early in my fieldwork, I sat in on several public events where local government and business leaders were discussing big changes in the state. The state was continuing to move away from its agricultural and industrial past, and now boasted a growing commercial sector connected to the new economy. In 2007 the state's local corporations, particularly those linked to the state's high-tech sector, were having trouble finding people who fit the requirements of their open positions. While industry leaders claimed they were in need of young professionals – educated, energetic, entrepreneurial, flexible workers and managers who could push their organizations forward to meet the demands of the fast-paced global marketplace, local demographers demonstrated a recent decline in the number of people under the age of forty in the state and government leaders were growing concerned. As one administrator stated at a public chamber of commerce meeting,

> It is our people - and the skills they have - that will ensure that [the state's] economy continues to lead the nation. Our young people are vital to the future of our state's economy, and we must do everything we can to keep their creativity and talents in [our state]. (Sept. 2007)

Concurrently, as I found out later and will discuss in this dissertation, the administrators within the state university were exploring ways to raise the profile of the public university in an increasingly privatized and corporation-focused economy. The administrators were hopeful that the creation of Generation Now would help the private business community address a major concern, and elevate the university to a more prominent position in the eyes of both government and private business leaders.

My entry point in this research was the "small hero" (Smith, 1987), or average layperson. In this case the small hero is a student or recent graduate transitioning from college or university into career. Throughout my research I "took their side." My intent was to be always cognizant of the experiences, constraints and stumbling blocks of the students and young workers. This approach, which may strike some readers as unusual, will be explained in Chapter 3, the methodology section of this document. Rather than take words about young workers from the media, or state and business leaders at face value, I was always most interested in real people and their activities.

In institutional ethnography, "institution" does not refer to individual institutions or organizations but to institutional settings and orders that have the power to concert action. Institutional ethnography is a form of research that opens up from individual everyday experience to understanding how people are constrained by larger relations of ruling. Institutional ethnographers do not use the term "levels" that mainstream organizational behavior scholars tend to use to separate macro processes from micro processes. They instead reject "micro" and "macro" as abstractions, and focus on finding the links between actual, observed actions and institutional structures by tracing precisely how individuals both shape, and react to, larger complexes of social relations.

Throughout my research I took the standpoint of the small heroes I saw in my research—young students and workers. By observing within Generation Now, I saw an inside view of university processes. I observed how those processes are embedded within the same social relations as local businesses, the media, and state government, as they all have an impact on young students and workers as they begin their careers.

These complexes of relations do not influence young workers equally, however. As depicted in Figure 1, transitioning into career takes place within the social organization of socioeconomic class. As I found in my research, local state governments and business organizations are looking for a certain category of workers with a certain form of career – young professionals. This form of career is not just about having a certain type of job, but also an entire lifestyle. Young people from the upper and middle classes are more easily able to create and succeed in a young professional career. They have access to more resources, often go to different colleges and universities, and are portrayed differently in the media than those in lower socioeconomic classes. They are more easily able to find jobs in local business, and are seen by local leaders as more desirable workers than those of lower socioeconomic classes by local leaders.

I document in this dissertation the extensive efforts of both the leaders of Generation Now and the students and young workers they targeted. Through this documentation, I show the consequences of the dominant conversation about careers in the state, and ultimately, I found that Generation Now was a window on a much bigger story – the relations of ruling that coordinate contemporary forms of career.

Understandings of "career" have changed over the past century. Originally scholars understood careers as a longitudinal chain of positions within one organization, while today they

are viewed as based on individual interests, passions and life histories. This dissertation shows how current forms of career are not, as is often thought today, based on individual autonomous actions, but actually are the outcome of forms of social coordination. Generation Now was centered on retaining young professionals who were working on building successful careers; therefore this dissertation focuses on young professional careers as outcomes of state economic development programs with consequences for young students and workers. By focusing on attracting and retaining the particular kind of worker that has been labeled "young professional," state leaders ultimately marginalize workers who cannot easily become young professionals.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 is devoted to a review of the relevant literature on the changing nature of careers. Career scholars have widely discussed the shift from "traditional careers," to "new careers." This shift was brought on by changing organization and economic structures – no longer are employees tied to one organization throughout their working lives but must be flexible and change jobs often. This chapter discusses how mainstream scholars and practitioners have claimed that "new careers" have changed individuals' relationships to their work, giving them much more personal control. Critical careers scholarship, however, refutes the extent of the change, and shows how new careers entrap people into contemporary power structures through subtle discursive mechanisms. At the end of this chapter I discuss how critical careers research has not typically addressed the explicit connections among individual career actions and the external social relations shaping new careers. This dissertation is a study that fills that gap using institutional ethnographic methods.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of institutional ethnography used in this research project and explains the data collection process. I illustrate how the tenets of institutional

ethnography are used to start from the experiences of students and young workers and trace outward to map the social relations that coordinate their everyday lives. Generation Now is introduced as an occasion for demonstrating how new careers are used in official university and state processes such that new careers discourse further permeates everyday lives.

Chapter 4 describes the background and context of Generation Now, and discusses how Generation Now is only one of many similar initiatives around the globe. Many regions are, in fact, trying to prevent the "brain drain" of their young workers who are seen as crucial resources in regional economic success. Previous research has shown, however, that the initiatives that are launched are often superficial and enhance the status of those groups in power, while ignoring marginalized populations. Using Generation Now as an example, I discuss how the logics of regional economic development are used in discussions of demographics and careers.

In Chapter 5 I turn to the young students and workers whose standpoint I adopted throughout this research. This chapter first analyzes the words of self-described young professionals who already had successful careers and were promoting Generation Now. It then presents data from interviews with young first-generation students and workers who were struggling with the financial and emotional pressures of becoming a young professional. I discovered that while sometimes people act as "young professionals," the term does not come from everyday experiences and everyday lives of students and workers. When those in organizational and governmental power positions focus on the status of 'young professional' as being important, the complexities and difficulties of everyday lives can disappear from view.

Following this, Chapter 6 presents data from inside the work of Generation Now, describing the marketing project that several groups of students were asked to do on behalf of initiative. These data reveal that students may have very different experiences in higher

education depending on their backgrounds and the college or university they attend. University and community leaders, however, ultimately attributed those distinctions to individual characteristics rather than social structures and backgrounds.

Chapter 7 presents the perspectives of business leaders on the opportunities for young workers. By conducting interviews with several human resources professionals and other business leaders in the state, I was able to reinforce the map the map of social relations constructed throughout Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, reiterates that while this particular initiative is situated in one locality, the textual practices and career discourses that coordinated this initiative are translocal and similar processes are happening in other regions. In this final discussion, I analyze the implications of this research for career studies, the teaching and scholarship of management university professors, and students and young workers. Possibilities for further research are presented.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF NEW CAREERS:

FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY OR FORM OF ENTRAPMENT?

Scholars interested in people and the workplace have used the concept of careers to understand individuals and their relationships to their occupations and places of work; as forms of work and organizing have shifted over time, so have conceptions of career. Scholars and practitioners studying new careers have claimed that they are very different from old careers, in that they allow for more possibilities for flexibility and personal expression. In this chapter, I trace the shift from "traditional" careers to "new" careers as studied and presented by career scholars - for both general career patterns and also patterns specific to New England, where the research for this dissertation was undertaken. I also discuss a body of careers scholarship written from the critical perspective. Critical careers scholars question assumptions underlying both the "traditional" and the "new" careers perspectives. The critique of careers scholarship shows "new" careers to be not so different from "old" careers in that they are constituted through the same power relations and based on similar assumptions of individuality and reified organization structures.

What has today become known as "traditional careers" was commonplace in management-track occupations for a number of decades in the mid-twentieth century in the U.S. Traditional careers unfolded primarily within a single organization, as workers and managers planned a lifetime association with an employer and, with the help of personnel departments and managers, could work their way up designated career ladders. After returning from World War II, my maternal grandfather went to work at a steel company on the east coast of the United

States. While he had attended an elite preparatory school for high school, he hadn't attended college. He started at the bottom in his new career, and worked his way up through the ranks until he was a supervisor, and then manager. He and his family moved up and down the coast, living in a number of different states as his career continued to advance. Finally, my grandfather served as president of the company for several years, and, after more than 30 years of service at the organization, retired at the age of fifty-five. Thirty years after his retirement and almost a decade after he passed away, my grandmother still receives his pension check.

Economic, technological and political shifts in the latter part of the 20th century have rendered the form of career my grandfather enjoyed very rare. New forms of more "flexible" organizations need more "flexible" employees. No longer are people going to work for one organization for the course of a lifetime, but rather changing jobs has become the norm. This means that individuals must personally "work on" their careers, networking, continuing their educations, and planning their moves from organization to organization strategically.

Though heralded as a major disruptive change in mainstream career literature, critical careers scholars have questioned whether "new careers" actually provide individuals with more freedom, and have shown in their research how the practice of "new careers" can ensnare individuals into power structures that benefit some people much more than others. The power of "new careers" has transformed "personal lives" into "work lives." Fournier (1998) explained:

> The new career model knows no boundary; it extends its logic to all domains. All life experiences (leisure, social relationships…) are to be harnessed and translated into career opportunities; and movement is no longer constrained to the confines of one organization, occupation or profession. The new career ostensibly breaks through all conventional barriers to open up "a world of opportunities" (59).

According to Fournier and other critical careers scholars, new careers are paradoxical. While new careers are associated superficially with freedom, they actually act as control mechanisms – not just during work hours, but also during "personal" time.

While a large body of critical careers research exists, there are still gaps in our understanding of how, specifically, individuals practice new careers discourse in their everyday lives, and how their practices are specifically linked to external social relations. At the end of this chapter I introduce institutional ethnography as a methodology that allows for careers research that starts from individuals and their actions and maps how they are connected to discursive practices emanating from outside of their everyday lives.

Traditional Careers

Career scholarship was growing during the post-World War II era, as managers became interested in maximizing employees' productivity potential through stable and meritocratic careers. Firms benefited from the traditional career model as employees would stay throughout the length of their careers, and employees benefited as their organizations kept them employed. In his classic work *The Organization Man*, Whyte (1956) described the model employee of the 1950s United States corporation as follows [italics in original]:

> *Be loyal to the company and the company will be loyal to you. After all, if you do a good job for the organization, it is only good sense for the organization to be good to you, because that will be the best for everybody. There are a bunch of real people around here. Tell them what you think and they will respect you for it. They don't want a man to fret and stew about his work. It won't happen to me. A man who gets ulcers probably shouldn't be in business anyway*. (129)

Whyte added:

> This is more than the wishful thinking normal of youth. Wishful it may be, but it is founded on a well-articulated premise – and one that not so many years ago would have been regarded by the then young men with considerable skepticism. The premise is, simply, that the goals of the individual and the goals of the organization will work out to be one and the same. The young men have no cynicism about the "system," and very little skepticism – they don't see it as something to be bucked, but as something to be cooperated with. (129)

In this "traditional" framework for understanding work in a corporation, individuals are comfortable aligning their own goals and plans with those of the organization and remaining employees of that organization throughout their working years. In return, the organization offered loyalty to its employees, as good as guaranteeing them positions and pensions for life.

Many corporate organizations defined careers as specific moves through ("up") an organization's hierarchy. In an early twentieth century description of career (later translated into English), Max Weber illustrated the rigid career path that an official in a bureaucracy strived for:

> The official is set for a "career" within the hierarchical order of the public service. He moves from the lower, less important, and lower paid to the higher positions. The average official naturally desires a mechanical fixing of the conditions of promotion: if not of the offices, at least of the salary levels. He wants these conditions fixed in terms of "seniority," or possibly according to grades achieved in a developed system of expert examinations. Here and there, such examinations actually form a character *indelebilis* of the official and have lifelong effects on his

> career. To this is joined the desire to qualify the right to office and the increasing tendency toward status group closure and economic security. (Gerth & Mills, 1946: 230)

Weber described a constrained path through an organization, where moving up was based on seniority or achievement of specific benchmarks. A structured path through one organization remained the primary understanding of careers for a number of decades (e.g., Gunz, 1989; Rosenbaum, 1984; Super, 1957).

During the time after World War II, when the "traditional career" model was the dominant understanding of career, a major role of the state was to promote an economy that would support the large corporations and provide insurance for individuals in the event of firms' closing down (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). In New England, the geographic region that was the focus of the research presented in this dissertation, patterns of career have gone through several major shifts since the industrial revolution. The economy in the state where my research was undertaken was once primarily agrarian; however, several coastal cities in and near the state helped to slowly transition the region from farming communities to an industrial powerhouse. By the 1700s, small mills in the area had already taken advantage of the many rivers running through New England, and at the end of that century city investment groups built new centers of industry by constructing several large textile mills in the region. Lewiston, Maine, Lowell, Massachusetts and Manchester, New Hampshire are examples of iconic New England small cities that became economically dependent on textile mills by the late 1700s (Heffernan & Stecker, 2004; Josephson, 1949; Moran, 2002).

Recruitment marketing campaigns were used by mill owners to attract new workers to the region. The Amoskeag mills of Manchester, NH, and the Lowell mills in Lowell, MA, for

example, marketed their factory positions to young men and women in Scotland and Canada, luring them to life in New England through labor agents who travelled to small towns and farming communities to recruit the workers desired by mill managers (Deitch, 1998; Hareven & Langenbach, 1978; Josephson, 1949). Baxendall and Gordon (1995) referred to the practice of hiring "farm girls" to work in textile mills:

> Women were so sought after for factory labor that traditional word-of-mouth recruitment could not supply hiring needs. Factories also relied on labor agents who were sent, on a commission basis, into the countryside to recruit women for the mills. Some factories used agents in Europe and recruited immigrants. (85)

Mill owners provided housing for their workers, and claimed that one of their primary purposes in building the textile industry was "to give employment to respectable women, to save them from poverty and idleness" (Josephson, 1949: 63). The women were given jobs, housing, and a carefully controlled work and social structure. Their parents were assured by mill representatives that the women would be well taken care of when they left the farms.

In the mid-nineteenth century the mills turned to hiring less expensive immigrant labor from first Ireland, and later French Canada. After their heyday, over a period of four or five decades the mills slowly closed, until the last of the large mills were closed in the 1970s. The end of the textile industry in the Northeast led to an economic slump in the mill towns that lasted for several decades. Economic and population growth in the mill towns and rural areas of New England slowed drastically (Danson, 2005; Hefferan & Stecker, 2004).

Throughout the decades of the 1940s-1970s, as traditional paper and textile mills died, and World War II veterans sought stability and security, traditional career paths through large corporate organizations became commonplace. As large corporate firms came to dominate the

economy, employees and managers during those decades counted on the advantage of the career guarantees they could enjoy in large organizations. Most of these jobs were found in larger cities and their suburbs, not in the mills towns (Hefferan & Stecker, 2004).

The Rise of the "New Career"

Although capitalist economies have always been in flux, periods of relative stability and change can be marked, and the last several decades have been a time of transformation (DeVault, 2008). Ideas about the "new economy" and related aspects of neoliberal policy have led to a period of intense discursive and practical changes in worldwide "organizational logics" (Löfgren, 2003). The ideal form of organization has changed (Kelly, 1998; Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2000; Löfgren, 2003). Technology has changed manufacturing processes and enabled easier transfer of knowledge and goods across borders. Now "knowledge work," or skilled work that typically required higher education (Cappelli, 1999), has, in many economic sectors, led to the transfer of manual labor from one geographic region to another, and the global economy has led to increased and more intense competition (Carnoy, 2000; Drucker, 1993). In response to these changes, organizations have adopted flatter management structures and more flexible production and service procedures (Löfgren, 2003; Thompson & Ottosen, 2003; Thrift, 2000).

Core values about how we should organize and work are no longer stability and loyalty, but instead flexibility, creativity, risk, global thinking, and constant innovation (Carnoy, 2000; Kelly, 1998; Levine et al., 2000). The organization of work has changed, as organizations have dis-aggregated, with more organizations relying on temporary workers, subcontractors and outsourcing. More people are now switching organizations several times throughout their

careers. As Nelson and Quick (2010) described in their organizational behavior textbook, an organization now

> …gains productivity while a person gains work experience. It is a short-term arrangement that recognizes that job skills change in value and that renegotiation of the relationship must occur as conditions change. This contrasts sharply with the mutual loyalty contract of the old career paradigm in which employee loyalty was exchanged for job security. (73)

This new, flexible arrangement between workers and organizations has changed the expectations for individuals, organizations and regions for developing and supporting the careers of people. Careers are now expected to take place across multiple organizations and geographic settings (e.g., Sullivan, 1999). "(S)ome of the hallmarks of a boundaryless career include: portable skills, knowledge, and abilities across multiple firms" (Sullivan, 1999: 458).

Nelson and Quick (2010) described how individuals should approach their careers according to the new paradigm.

> The best way to stay employed is to see yourself as being in business for yourself, even if you work for someone else. Know what skills you can package for other employers and what you can do to ensure that your skills are state of the art. Organizations need employees who have acquired multiple skills and are adept at more than one job. Employers want employees who have demonstrated competence in dealing with change. To be successful, think of organizational change not as a disruption to your work but instead as the central focus of your work. You will also need to develop self-reliance…to deal effectively with the stress of change. (276)

For individuals, changes in career patterns have greatly impacted how their work lives will unfold (Hall, 1996). New careers are "boundaryless" (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and/or "protean" (e.g., Briscoe, Hall & DeMuth, 2006), involving much more movement within and between organizations. There is a new "psychological contract" (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Greenhaus, 2003; Inkson & Arthur, 2001) between workers and their employers, which many scholars have claimed is a positive change for those who might have been physically and psychologically trapped in the "old career" model (e.g., Hall et al., 1996; Sullivan, 1999).

The new contract dictates that workers desiring a successful career must now take more responsibility for developing their own career futures by networking and gaining access to resources. Students and young workers now learn to start building and managing their own personal networks during university and early in their careers. They are told that career management is an individual, rather than an organizational responsibility (Sturges, Guest & Mackenzie, 2000).

As Weick (1996) explained "[c]areers still mean journeys, but the destinations are no longer fixed levels in a hierarchy, but fluid positions of expertise in a heterarchy organized around collective learning" (p. 41). The role of organizations in the career development of employees has changed greatly. While management of large organizations used to take a "paternalistic" view of their employees (Nelson & Quick, 2010), they now take on the role of managing the turnover of employees who are taking personal responsibilities for their careers. While firms today do not typically promise long careers, managers are expected to enhance the future employability of those who work for them. This means the organization must retain a

strong reputation and communicate their company strategies clearly. It also means offering training and networking opportunities for employees (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Economic geographer Richard Florida (2002, 2008) has written several bestsellers and consulted around the world with city and regional leaders on regional success in the new economy. He has called cities and regions "Creative Centers" because, he claims, they are the areas that have cracked the code for attracting the "Creative Class." The Creative Class is the elite in the new economy—creative, entrepreneurial individuals who are also very good at managing their own careers. Florida (2002) summarized some of the changing responsibilities for regional leaders under this new paradigm.

> The Creative Centers are not thriving for such traditional economic reasons as access to natural resources or transportation routes. Nor are they thriving because their local governments have given away the store through tax breaks and other incentives to lure business. They are succeeding largely because creative people want to live there. The companies then follow the people – or, in many cases, are started by them. Creative centers provide the integrated eco-system or habitat where all forms of creativity – artistic and cultural, technological and economic – can take root and flourish. (218)

Florida claimed that the most important work of regional leaders is to develop a "world class people climate" (Florida, 2002: 293). A region with a strong people climate will have many opportunities for employment, a desirable lifestyle, opportunities for social interaction, and diversity.

Other scholars have found that most central to the agendas of many regional leaders are people as "the main agents of economic growth" (Houston et al., 2008: 135). A skilled

knowledge-based labor force is seen as critical for organizations and localities operating in today's economy (Mathur, 1999). Saxenian (1996) studied the region of Silicon Valley in California, and found that it was the workforce, and "open" patterns of careers that were allowing the region to achieve such success – not the individual firms. It is now

> the region and its relationships, rather than the firm, that defines opportunities for individual and collective advances in Silicon Valley. It suggests that open labor markets – and the corresponding career paths – offer important competitive advantages over traditional corporate job ladders in a volatile economic environment. (23)

Following Florida's and others' claims, development programs have been undertaken to make cities and states more attractive by building the right kind of infrastructure and creating new marketing initiatives to create the desired image of place (Peck, 2005). This competitive regional planning along with individual mobility has led to large migrational shifts, which are being analyzed for new patterns and outcomes (e.g., Baruch et al., 2007; Carr et al., 2005). Regional leaders combat "brain drain" by finding and building a skilled, career-oriented workforce so that existing local businesses will be more likely to remain in the area and new businesses will be enticed to move in. State universities are charged with educating the population for the current economic conditions by developing relationships with corporations and other private sources of innovation and revenue (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Universities, in a sense, are playing a role parallel to that of the labor agents for the textile mills.

Regional development programs focus on continual economic growth and international competition with the specific goals of adding or increasing particular educational opportunities, creating jobs, improving technological infrastructure, incubating and attracting new high-tech

business, re-branding manufacturing companies into technology companies, expanding the local tax base through place marketing, fostering small firm growth and attracting new forms of investment (Hubbard & Hall, 1998; Zimmerman, 2008). Analyses of the consequences of these programs are mixed: evidence indicates that the programs are typically beneficial only to regional elites, they fail in their promises to expand opportunities for multiple segments of the population (Houston et al., 2008; Zimmerman, 2008) and often come at the expense of retaining or growing social infrastructure (MacLeod, 2001).

Economic shifts came again, as technology became central in American corporate life. In the late 1970s and 1980s New England saw an expansion of defense industry and business services. People relocated to work at the growing businesses, and the real estate market expanded as well. Another economic slump in the late 1980s and early 1990s ended with an influx of high-tech innovators and businesses in the mid and late 1990s. Many of the factories in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, for example, that were empty by the 1970s have been renovated and many of the huge brick buildings that held machinery and industrial workers in the past now house high-end condominiums, high-tech firms, marketing companies and professional staffs. The areas have been "re-branded" into centers of technology and commerce (e.g. Mahoney, 2007; Mowry, 2007).

In 2007, when I began my research, factory laborers were no longer in demand. Workers were needed, but in the twenty-first century young professionals, focused on developing their careers, were considered crucial to the region's success. In this context, with career changes happening in New England, and around the globe, the Weberian notion of career no longer was applicable. "Organization Man" and "traditional careers" were only possible within a limited set of institutional conditions.

Careers and the Critical Perspective

As discussed above, some mainstream, or managerialist, career scholars have argued that new "more flexible" forms of career offer more opportunities for fulfilling work that meets personal needs (Hall, 1996). Other research, however, has demonstrated that the primary outcome of shifting career patterns has been "the transfer of burden of market uncertainty onto wage-earners" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005: 218). Studies critical of the changes in economic structures have called attention, for example, to the financial burdens and psychological stresses associated with the instability of these new career patterns (Lawler et al., 2002; Uchitelle, 2006) and the difficulties that might arise from moving away from friends and family to pursue job opportunities (Baldridge, Eddleston &Veiga, 2006). Sennett (2000) found that the lack of commitment those engaged in the "new" economy must demonstrate carried over from the work world into employees' personal lives. Table 1 highlights the distinctions among traditional careers scholarship, new careers scholarship, and critical careers scholarship.

Changes in career structures have changed the intensity of individuals' work days. While it is true that there has been a shift towards more work flexibility, the changes have come at a price. Longer hours, as well as de-unionization and "a quelling of social critique" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005: 73) have constrained workers in ways that are often hidden through the discourses of new careers.

People must be "flexible," constantly willing to sever relationships and contracts, making it harder to feel rooted and develop permanent bonds in a community. Rather than flexible, shifting careers allowing for a focus on finding "fulfilling" work that meets "personal needs," this line of thinking shows how new careers instead trap people into unstable working conditions absent sources of social support that force them to be extremely self-disciplined and self-reliant.

An important stream of critical careers research reflects both an anti-essentialist view of the person as well as a concern with reifying macro sociological concepts (Coupland, 2004). Under this set of assumptions, "career" acts as a set of discursive and technical practices, and is a crucial component in current forms of subjectivity constitution (Fournier, 1998; Grey, 1994). Poststructural critical scholars reject the idea of a psychological subject, as well as "careers" and "organizations" as entities that exist outside of social relations. Careers scholars taking this stance understand that careers tie subjects tightly into economic imperatives that do not arise from their own personal needs. In this postructuralist view, people who are ostensibly working on their careers for their own personal benefits, have no choice but to be "enterprising" in ways that benefit those already in power.

"Enterprise culture" is a term used by poststructuralist scholars to distinguish new work structures and processes (such as career structures) from those seen in traditional bureaucratic arrangements (Salaman & Storey, 2008 – see entire special issue). The values of such an enterprise culture were first championed by US and British neo-liberal economists and politicians in the 1980s and were spread in tandem with vast privatization campaigns introducing previously state-owned assets such as utility companies to "the full rigors of competition" (Turner, 2008: 131). Social programs such as welfare, social security, and education were scaled back to reduce dependency on the state and to encourage private enterprise. Individuals, under these new imperatives and logic, need self-reliance and personal courage—those who are more entrepreneurial will thrive. Enterprise culture operates in multiple sites simultaneously and explicitly provides a link among neo-liberal political and economic imperatives and personal identities (Rose, 1990 as cited in Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005).

Enterprise culture, critical scholars argue, is particularly central in the development of work structures and personal subjectivities in the new economy. The defining characteristics of the people and organizations of the new economy – i.e. flexible, self-reliant and entrepreneurial (e.g. Storey et al, 2005) – are directly connected to enterprise culture. Poststructuralist explorations of contemporary forms of work have found that subjectivity is often impacted by values explicitly related to the new economy—such as flexibility (Martin, 2000), speed (Thrift, 2000), entrepreneurship (Rose, 1990), and creativity (McRobbie, 2002). The concept of "new" careers, in this view, offers a template allowing both organizations and individuals to respond to the changes wrought by the new economy. Organizations are able to adapt their workforces and processes quickly to changes in the marketplace because their employees are motivated to find innovative solutions to problems and don't need close supervision.

"Boundaryless," or boundary-crossing careers are characterized not just by physical mobility, but also by psychological mobility – "the subjective attitude of being boundaryless" (Inkson, 2006: 54). People must have the will and the personal resources to cross boundaries, to feel that they have choices (Inkson, 2006). In enterprise culture the notion of "choice" is a significant discursive practice. Researchers focused on the rise of enterprise culture have discussed the ways in which, through making successful choices, we become who we want to be (Rose, 1990 as cited in Nayak & Beckett, 2008). Career often becomes like other commodities in enterprise culture – it must be marketed and consumed by rational actors attempting to minimize risk by "behaving rationally, taking appropriate care of the self and exhibiting self-knowledge and self-control" (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008: 394). In an enterprise environment, choosing the appropriate career is crucial to shaping the self.

Individuals with successful careers do not need to be closely supervised at work, and ultimately their self-discipline extends outside the workplace, as they are typically working on self-improvement strategies across multiple spectrums of life (Garsten & Grey, 1997). Critical careers scholars claim that self-discipline and self-improvement ultimately benefit large organizations and governments much more than individual workers. People engaged in new careers also need to be self-motivated and self-developing, not just during their 9-to-5 jobs, but also during their "free time" (e.g., Du Gay, 1996; Grey, 1994; Rose, 1990). Self-help books (Garsten & Grey, 1997) and career or life coaches (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) support people (for an extra cost) in these endeavors.

In an early example of scholarship that links new forms of career to disciplinary practices, Grey (1994) studied the personnel files, and interviewed staff members, of a large accounting firm. He found the employees in that firm accepted, and even welcomed, disciplinary practices such as annual reviews if they thought they were helpful for their career. Mundane tasks such as entering data into spreadsheets were transformed into activities that led towards promotion and built careers. Grey found that careers were more central for employees near the top of the company hierarchy. For these employees, much of their personal lives, along with their work lives, were dedicated to advancing their careers. For those whose whole lives were dedicated to their careers, "friends become transformed into 'contacts' and social activity becomes 'networking'" (Grey, 1994: 493).

Fournier (1998) built on this work in her study of a British service sector organization. She focused on exploring the stories employees across the organization told about themselves and their careers, and her study outlined the ways that new "entrepreneurial" careers were "intertwined" with the "culture of excellence and enterprise" (58) practiced today. She found that

having a career aligned the individual projects of growth with the goals of the organization. Fournier explained, "through the new career model, the pursuit of organizational excellence and individual self-realization are constructed as not only compatible but mutually dependent. Individuals are mobilized as subjects able and willing to contribute to, and benefit from, the excellence project" (59).

In a recent study, Cremin (2009) focused on "employability" and showed how this concept acted as a control mechanism in current forms of career. Employees must constantly concern themselves with remaining employable by continuing to network and to find training opportunities. Cremin explained, "the insecurity of and dissatisfaction with the particular job or labour is offset by the possibility that better jobs will come along" (136). To remain employable, individuals must engage with capitalist imperatives of work organizations and continually enhance their self-image to match that of the ideal "desired workers."

Critical Careers Research and Institutional Ethnography

While critical careers scholars have advanced our understandings of new careers as discursive control mechanisms, there are still gaps in the body of existing research. Studies from this critical standpoint tend to adopt poststructuralist approaches to inquiry, which point researchers towards entering the field through the discourse, rather than through people's experiences. These studies are focused on the discourses and how they operate; for example, both Grey's (1994) and Fournier's (1998) research focused on enterprising career discourse, while Cremin's (2009) started from the discourse of employability.

There is currently a dearth of studies that focus on the formation of subjectivities related to "new careers" from the standpoint of the subjects themselves. Institutional ethnography, the research approach adopted in this dissertation, points researchers towards recognizing that people

are not just objects of particular discourses, but they actively practice multiple discourses at once. Institutional ethnography is distinct from other critical methodologies in that it begins from actual experiences. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) explained:

> People's lives happen in real time and in real locations to real people. Institutional ethnographers explore the actual world in which things happen, in which people live, work, love, laugh, and cry. Exploring that is a different research undertaking from approaches that objectify people and events, and slot them into theoretical categories to arrive at explanations…our theory commits us not to theoretical explanations, but to certain theorized practices of looking at the actualities of everyday life. Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events are actually tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power, knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture, and so on. (17)

Institutional ethnographers are first and foremost interested in understanding people and their everyday lives, and how those lives are shaped by external social relations. By starting from people themselves, institutional ethnographers can uncover how they actually enact the worlds they inhabit.

Like other critical careers researchers, I have found in this study that there is a dark side to "new careers," and that for many, the struggle to build a "new career" is a huge burden. This project starts from the everyday lives of people, specifically the students and young workers who were the targets of a university initiative to retain more college graduates in a small state in New England and traces specific connections between their lives and the neoliberal projects of economic development. In the following chapter on research methodology I discuss institutional

ethnography and how it allows these connections to be made. I detail the research program undertaken for this study, including the research questions and data gathering techniques.

Table 1: Career Scholarship: Multiple Perspectives

	Traditional Careers Scholarship	New Careers Scholarship	Critical Careers Scholarship
Definition of Career	The evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time. A career happens primarily within one organization along a standard path (Nelson & Quick, 2010).	A pattern of work-related experiences that spans the course of a person's life. A career happens within multiple organizations; the form a career takes depends on an individual's goals, interests, and ability to self-manage (Nelson & Quick, 2010).	A set of discursive and technical practices, and a crucial component in current forms of subjectivity constitution (Fournier, 1998; Grey, 1994).
Understanding of Organizations	Steadily growing, stable entities that that form permanent relationships with individuals by providing job security and standardized employment and career opportunities (Nelson & Quick, 2010).	Rapidly growing and changing entities with constantly shifting goals and strategies. Do not offer life-long jobs, but do allow for growth and training opportunities for individuals. (Hall, 1996)	Socially constructed institutions whose central task is the management of subjectivity (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1990).
Understanding of Individuals	Psychological beings interested in stability and standardized career paths. Willing to comply with rules and norms and remain loyal to one organization in exchange for management support.	Flexible psychological beings willing to self-manage and self-develop. Interested in finding careers they are passionate about and deriving meaning from their careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).	Social beings embedded in history and social relations. Subjectivities are coordinated by social structures to fit into relations of production and accumulation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005)
Understanding of Regions/ Regional Governments	Supports citizenry through public education and unemployment protections for workers. Promotes a "business climate" that allows for industrial growth (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).	Supports creative, entrepreneurial business activity. Provides public education and support joint public/private education initiatives (Florida, 1994)	Agents of corporate power (Rose, 1990). Sponsor public education, a critical site in subjectivity formation (Mitchell, 2006)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research has demonstrated how the paradoxical new career discourse creates tension for individual workers. Though the mainstream definition posits contemporary careers as reflective of individuals' interests and passions, this study uses institutional ethnography to demonstrate how new careers are explicitly linked to neoliberal practices emanating from state policies and actions. Generation Now, an effort to entice recent college graduates to remain in a small state in the northeast United States, was an occasion for observing how new career discourse is embedded in state and university policy and practices, facilitating its permeation into everyday lives.

The research inquiry presented in this dissertation follows the tenets of institutional ethnography and starts from the point of view of students and recent graduates who were the objects of Generation Now and first explores their expectations and everyday lives. To uncover how their experiences were embedded in larger social relations, I turned to Generation Now, an official, state-university effort that used new career discourse, in particular the discourse of "young professionalism." This work demonstrates how young people involved with the initiative were using or rejecting its discursive practices related to career.

In this chapter institutional ethnography as a methodology is presented, and the research inquiries of several prior institutional ethnographies are discussed to show the various ways

researchers use this approach. This chapter then presents a description of how institutional ethnography is used in this study to map the social relations of new careers. I discuss how data were gathered through interviews and observations and I construct a map demonstrating how Generation Now was part of a larger set of official power relations of state university and government, becoming a conduit through which new career discourse coordinated individual action.

Institutional Ethnography: An Introduction

Institutional ethnography is an alternative sociology and methodology that allows researchers to map the ways discursive practices are embedded within larger social relations that organize knowledge and experience (e.g., Smith, 1987, 2005). For this research project, I was interested in the experiences of individuals related to new career discourse, which was being perpetuated by state leaders through the state university project entitled "Generation Now."

Institutional ethnography draws from feminism, Marxism, and ethnomethodology to create a method of inquiry distinct from mainstream management research methods. Dorothy Smith, the originator of institutional ethnography, explained that there is a "powerful politics in mainstream sociology," (1999: 31) and that academic scholarship traditionally has required working within institutional boundaries, thus losing the real experiences of actual people, especially those who come from positions outside the primary power structure. The experiences of women, and other disenfranchised populations, are often lost in academic research—they are presented as disembodied objects in scholarly texts. Smith aspired to create a methodology that would not only recognize women's experiences, but start from them, and then trace outwards to provide maps of macro-social powers and processes. Smith (1999) explained:

> Such a sociology or sociologies would recognize that, as Marx saw, the social comes into being only as the doings of actual people under definite material conditions and that we enter into social relations beyond our control that our own activities bring into being. Thus our own powers contribute to power that stands over us. (25)

As Smith explained, in institutional ethnography the term "social relations" has been used in its Marxist sense. As DeVault (2008) explains, institutional ethnographers also have followed Marx in that they:

> understand work processes as the fundamental grounding of social life. They do not privilege paid work, but keep in mind the broader requirements of embodied existence--people's need to sustain themselves, their connections of mutual care and dependence, and the activities that nurture and educate a next generation. (5)

Actual actions and experiences are crucial in this methodology. Institutional ethnographers are focused on understanding what actually happens throughout everyday lives, during both work and "personal time."

From observations of everyday lives, mapping connections between people and work processes with the intention of showing processes of accountability to relations of ruling becomes the focus of the research. As Smith (2005) explained,

> Every local setting of people's activity is permeated, organized by, and contributes to social relations coordinating activities in multiple local sites. The work of the sociologist is to discover these relations and to map them so that people can begin to see how their own lives and work are hooked into the lives and work of others in relations of which most of us are not aware. (87)

By seeking ways to access external mechanisms coordinating individual actions, institutional ethnographers recognize that although everyday life may sometimes seem chaotic and messy, it is actually often coordinated by ruling relations, or the "extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives – the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourses, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them" (Smith, 2005, 8).

The maps that institutional ethnographers create show that ruling relations categorize people into groups through labels such as "single mothers," "nurses," or "students." The application of the labels leads to individuals becoming subject to the ruling relations, as they become identified as and subjected to labeling and categorization schemes. Unfortunately, the official definitions of the categories often contradict what is actually going on in everyday lives. This creates tension for many, especially those from minority or disenfranchised populations. Institutional ethnographers are devoted to understanding how individuals are not only coordinated by these subjective categories, but also complicit in shaping them.

Smith described her first, now considered classic, institutional ethnographic study as a period of discovery beginning from the everyday lives of herself and her colleague, Alison Griffith (Smith, 1987, 2005). Smith and Griffith began their inquiry with their own experiences as single working mothers, finding through casual discussions that they both felt their mothering work was falling short of ideals, particularly in regards to their children's schooling (e.g., Griffith & Smith, 1990; Smith, 1987; Smith & Griffith, 1990). Turning their discussions into a research project, they began exploring the experiences of other mothers, finding that many felt

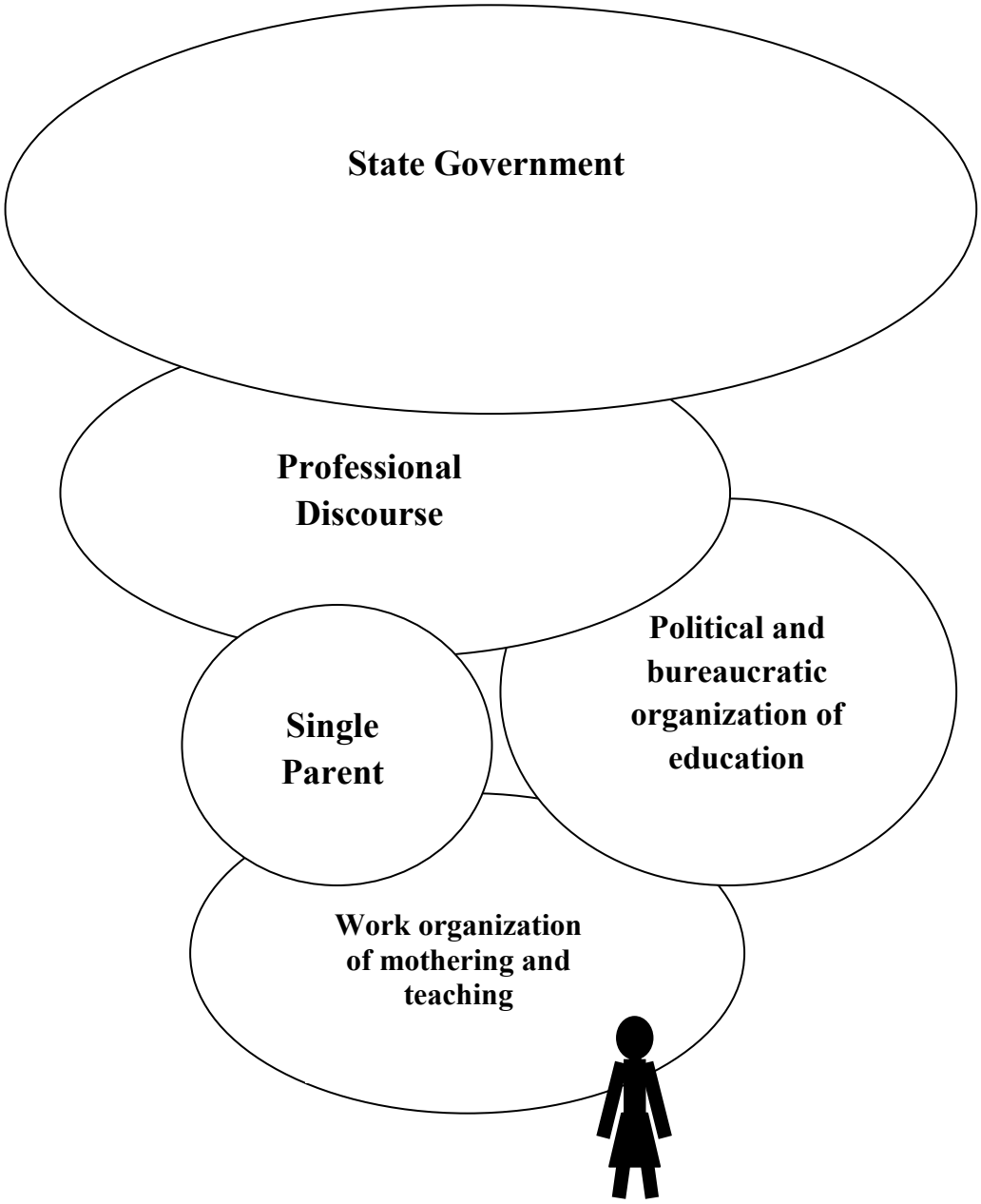
the same way. Working from the standpoint of single mothers, Smith and Griffith began to "trace outwards," interviewing parents, teachers, school administrators, social workers, and central office administrators, learning from each participant about his or her everyday work, and through these accounts constructing the intricate family-school relations. They constructed more of the overall picture from each informant. During the course of Smith and Griffith's work, connections were made between the "particularity of women's life and experiences and the social relations of the society in which they/we live" (Griffith, 1995: 110).

Figure 1 is a recreation of Smith's pictorial representation of how their research inquiry progressed and the social relations they encountered. The "design" of this figure "embeds the work of mothering in a complex of relations that organizes its social and material character" (Smith, 1987: 170).

> To have begun to recover the character of the work and work organization is only the first step. The next is to explore how that work process is embedded in the social relations of the extended social and economic process. To do this we work with a procedure we have come to call "making a design." The design provides a preliminary sketch of the relevant relations…The design describes as an area for investigation the relations implicated in and organizing the everyday world. (Smith, 1987: 170)

A classed discourse of mothering led to standardized mothering practices coordinated by the institutionalized family-school relations (Griffith & Smith, 1990). Furthermore, "single mother" was a category the schools used to interpret actions of mothers and children and to help teachers, administrators, and mothers themselves understand how "defects," so called by school officials, in mothering practice might produce children's problems at school (Smith, 1987).

Figure 1: The Experience of a Single Parent (Smith, 1987: 171)



Smith and Griffith started their research from their own feelings of disjuncture between how they were understood through the schools as "single mothers" versus their own day-to-day lives. Disjuncture such as this, "between different versions of reality – knowing something from a ruling versus an experiential perspective" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004: 48), are known in institutional ethnography as "problematics." Institutional ethnographers identify problematics through the experiences of the people whose standpoints have been adopted, and use them to set a very specific direction for the next phase of research inquiry. Rankin (2008), for example, uncovered a research problematic through working with a group of nurse trainees. She and the trainees wondered why their efforts to complete the training program were so immensely stressful – causing many to drop out. The nurse trainees were intelligent and hardworking, and wanted to be productive, contributing members of the medical community – why were they dropping out or constantly contemplating it? Rankin and her informants found that the texts associated with the trainees' evaluation were highly failure-oriented; i.e., the texts were constantly positioning the trainees as failing (or at least some distance from failure) and didn't offer trainees any means of constructive support. As the actions of the teachers and administrators of the program were typically coordinated by those texts, there were few sources of encouragement for the trainees. The disjuncture between the text-based actions of the teachers and administrators and the support the trainees actually needed formed Rankin's problematic.

Since Smith and Griffith's initial research, scholars such as Rankin have applied institutional ethnography in studies of restructuring processes aimed at improving managerial and accountability processes in research sites such as hospitals (Rankin 2008; Rankin & Campbell, 2006), social work organizations (De Montigny, 1995), and nursing homes (Diamond, 1992). Taking the standpoint of social workers, nurses, and aides, these studies show how the

everyday work of care professionals has become removed from the needs of their patients and the professionals themselves. Their daily practices have been increasingly dictated by forms, discourses, and texts written to conform to neoliberal ideologies. These ideologies require individuals to act in accordance with the management priorities of efficiency and productivity. As organizations become more management-focused, new recording and accounting procedures are adopted that help to guide individual actions.

Other institutional ethnographic researchers have found local, state, and federal government practices produce texts and discourses that shape everyday actions in local settings in surprising, conflicting, and unsettling ways. For example, Turner (2002, 2003) analyzed the textual practices of municipal planning in her research on a small-town land dispute. She studied a group of residents who opposed the approval of a large corporate development that was to be built on local wetlands, and the process they went through to voice their disapproval. To do this study, Turner acted as a participant observer and worked with the residents (who were her starting point) fighting against the development. She attended hundreds of meetings, building a map of the documents, actions and discourses used in the government processes surrounding the dispute.

Turner (2002, 2003) found that the official town meetings and town voting procedures occurred within ruling relations. This meant that, although the residents were given many opportunities to voice their opposition, they were doing so through the institution of local government. To make their arguments legitimate, the residents who opposed the development had to use standardized texts and arguments to combat the developers. They had to fill out forms and make their arguments in official town meetings according to the town by-laws. By following these procedures, the residents became accountable to the ruling relations of the state

government. By participating in this way, the residents were not engaged in a citizen or social action separate from the state, but were drawn into the workings of the state institution, and their disapproval became part of the structure of the local government. The residents' actions were ultimately not effective at stopping the development.

As Turner's work underscored, understanding how power functions in contemporary society requires being aware of textual practices that create "objectified forms of knowledge and apparently neutral, subject-less accounts of people and situations" (McCoy, 1998: 395). Documents and texts are capable of coordinating the actions of many people across multiple sites of action. The standardized texts used in the land-use dispute described by Turner (2002), for example, organized and shaped "what residents know, orient to, and say in council meetings, in the news media, thereby playing a part in organizing local politics" (Turner, 2002: 321).

Institutional ethnographers have traced the connection among individual words and actions to federal government policies. Weigt (2006), for example, uncovered the ways that the demands of welfare-to-work programs intersected with dominant mothering discourses for a group of women, so that the women were led to blame themselves, rather than institutional structures for their difficulties and failings. While the welfare-to-work discourse pushed women to go back to work and support their families, the dominant mothering discourse required that they constantly be present for their children. As the women in the program attempted to navigate these conflicting standards of behavior, Weigt (2006) showed how, while both discourses often seemed natural, they have actually originated from ruling relations external to the mothers and the demands of mothers' own particular personal lives.

In another example, Chio (2005, 2008) used institutional ethnography to uncover the ruling relations underlying the "Malaysia 2020" initiative, a federal effort to expand the economy

of the developing nation through quality management. Chio undertook interviews and observations within large multinational corporations and governmental agencies in Malaysia. Chio explained,

> This guided tour through the terrain of official Malaysia that led me from the private confines of the two multinationals to numerous statutory agencies and so on, I have come to think of as "tracing the productivity and quality trail." While seemingly haphazard at first, I soon realized as the names of certain institutions and certain references (e.g. training, standards, efficiency), kept cropping up that this information given to me was a central part of the transfers and development nexus I was trying to document. Put another way, this mapping and tracing of the terrain became, in effect, a way of executing institutional ethnography in the field. (Chio, 2005: 32)

Chio's (2008) research showed how quality control became highly standardized throughout the country, and those standards were distributed through texts – training packets – to organizations and their employees. This enabled the workers to participate in quality management in the appropriate way. The more the workers became versed in the standards, the better they were able to construct their own, highly internally-regulated work life. Education and workplace trainings became central to teaching the population how to work to the standards desired by national leaders, and managerial discourse that pushed workers to continue to enact the desired self-sufficient, self-regulating behaviors was pervasive.

In this present research I use institutional ethnography to trace the terrain where individual lives and the discourse of new career intersect. I started from the standpoint of

young students and workers. By gaining access to Generation Now I was able to uncover how this discourse worked in an official capacity to permeate individual lives.

Negotiating Access

As I entered the dissertation stage of my graduate program, I knew that I wanted to study early careers, as I had begun that line of research during my coursework. I didn't, however, have a specific focus or research site. Entering this last phase of my graduate studies, I was married and pregnant, which constrained the possible topics I could address (an international comparison study would not be possible!). To find time to uncover a dissertation focus, I took the spring semester off from teaching. On one of my days home alone, reading and taking notes, I heard a university administrator on a local radio talk show speaking about his new idea for retaining young people in the small state where I lived. The administrator explained Generation Now, a state university-led marketing plan he was launching to retain more students in the state after graduation.

During this call-in radio show, I heard that the initiative was getting complex reactions from residents of the state. Some people called in and praised the initiative, but I also heard many people critiquing the administrators' efforts. One resident wrote an email that was read on the air. He wrote, "I am a former student of [state university] am also resident of [the state] I have very little confidence that [the state] can provide the needed jobs – I am the only one from my class with a decent job." The administrator replied that he would need a better understanding of the interests and motivation of the resident's classmates to understand why his peers were not finding jobs. Hearing these very divergent reactions to the initiative, and very different understandings of the available jobs in the state sparked my interest. I wanted to understand more about how these divergent stories were created and impacting young people and the state.

I emailed the administrator explaining that not only did I live in the state where he was launching his initiative, but also that I had grown up there. I told him I was a graduate student looking for a research site and about my interest in studying early careers and the transition from college to careers. When I didn't hear from the administrator for a few weeks, I sent a second email and letter. Several days later I received an email from his secretary, and was able to arrange to meet with him two weeks later—the next time he was visiting the small city where I lived.

The administrator emailed me the day before we were going to meet, asking me to meet him in the lobby of the hotel where he was staying. He told me that I would recognize him because he always wore a bowtie. I responded that he would recognize me because I was seven months pregnant. I met the administrator, a man in his 50s, thin, bald and wearing a bowtie. He was extremely friendly, and we laughed about our exchange of information about how to recognize each other. We had coffee and he told me about the problems the state was having in retaining young college graduates, and his plans for launching Generation Now.

In negotiating access to Generation Now, I used my own "insider" status as a resident of the state as leverage. When I spoke to the administrator at our meeting, I was able to talk about my history in the state, as well as my research interests. During that meeting, I also established myself as a participant in the research, not just an outside observer, explaining that I would be willing to help with small administrative tasks in exchange being allowed to be present at planning meetings for Generation Now. Despite my willingness to help with small tasks, I also knew that as a critical scholar, my primary task in the field would be to observe how new career discourse was being used, and to uncover assumptions underlying the initiative. I hoped that I would be able to strike a balance between retaining the goodwill of administrators by helping

them, while also keeping a critical stance towards the economic and social imperatives driving their work. Early interactions with the administrator established a pattern of my status within Generation Now – one that was constantly shifting and being renegotiated between "inside" and "outside" Generation Now and related state activities.

Research Questions

Generation Now was a complex initiative in terms of the people and institutions involved; the university, businesses, state government, as well as students and young professionals were all central in its activities. I needed a methodology that would allow me to reach these parties – not to understand them as individuals, but to understand them as a complex of relations existing in a particular social context. Institutional ethnography allowed for this mapping process, and allowed me to add more pieces to the larger relations of the puzzle as I moved through my fieldwork. As DeVault and McCoy (2002) explained:

> Institutional ethnographic investigations are rarely planned out fully in advance, identifying research sites, informants, texts to analyze, or even questions to pursue with informants. Instead the process of inquiry is like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of. (755)

The research questions I explored during my time in the field were:

- How do young people incorporate new careers discourse into their everyday lives?
- What are the social relations underlying Generation Now, and how do those relations shape specific goals and work processes?
- How do such state initiatives coordinate the career actions of young workers?

During the research process, several more questions became important, including:

- How are young people integrating the external social relations related to economic and population development projects into their personal career strategies?
- What are the consequences of the work of a state initiative that focuses on attracting and retaining one group of residents with particular forms of career (in this case, young professionals)?
- And finally, what are other perspectives –from people and groups outside of my fieldwork site—regarding current economic and social needs?

See Table 2 for a summary of how data were collected to answer each question.

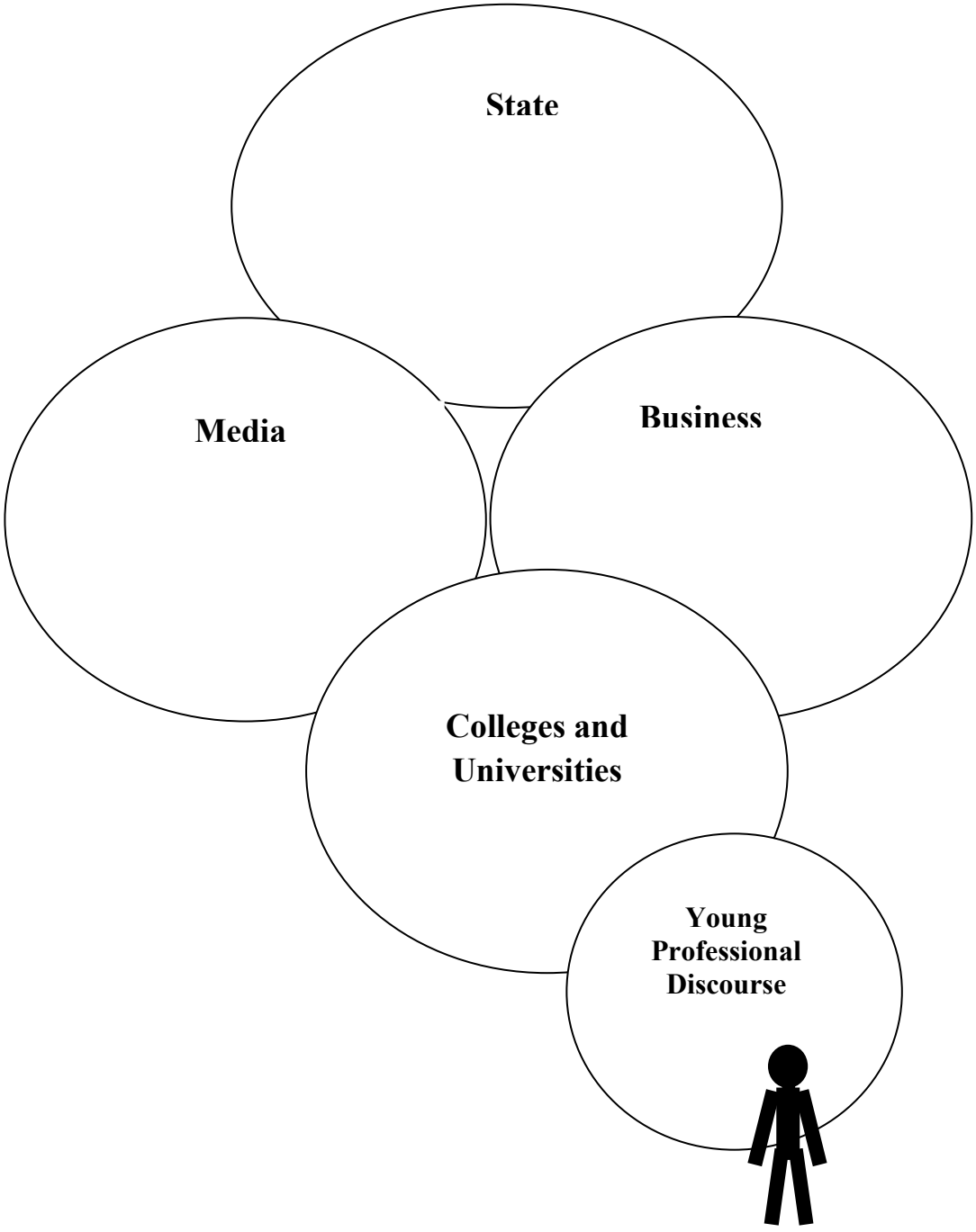
My interviews with young students and workers and observations of Generation Now began soon after Generation Now was launched in 2007, and continued through the spring of 2009, at which point Generation Now was dissolved and absorbed into a new non-profit organization. At that point I began the analysis phase of the research. I obtained approval for this research from the Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts Amherst Internal Review Board and informed consent from the research participants at private meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

Analysis in my research begins from the standpoint of students and young professionals transitioning into their careers, represented by the "small hero" in the bottom right-corner of Figure 2. From there, I traced outward to show how their everyday lives are embedded within larger social relations. In subsequent data chapters, this map will become more complex.

Table 2: Research Questions and Data Collection Strategies

Research Question	What does the work of the people involved in a state initiative to retain young workers look like?	What are the social relations underlying such an initiative, and how do those relations shape specific goals and work processes?	How do such state initiatives directly coordinate the career actions of young workers?	How are young people integrating the external social relations related to economic and population development projects into their personal career strategies?	What are the consequences of the work of a state initiative that focuses on attracting and retaining one group of residents with particular forms of career (in this case, young professionals)?	What are other perspectives –from people and groups outside of my fieldwork site -- regarding current economic and social needs?
Data Collection	Participant-Observation	Participant-Observation	Participant-Observation	Participant-Observation Interviews and focus groups	Interviews and focus groups	Interviews
Main Sources of Primary Data	Initiative meetings and documents Public events	Initiative meetings and documents Public events Governor's task force meetings Media	University and college marketing classes	University and college marketing classes Interviews Media	Interviews with students and young professionals Interviews with human resources professionals	Interviews with human resources professionals and business leaders

Figure 2: Young Professionals: A Complex of Relations



Starting from the "Small Heroes"

Early in the observations of Generation Now, young people were talking about their lives and career choices in relation to the initiative. Conflicting messages about the career opportunities in the state were heard, and the young people telling these stories became the "small heroes" in this research. Their point of view, which I listened for during my early observations, and later focused on during the interview phase of this research, formed the foundation of this study. Generation Now was an occasion for observing the explicit connections among the actions of young people as related to their careers and the economic imperatives of state and business officials.

Observations of Generation Now

During my observations of Generation Now, the majority of time was spent with one university administrator. He worked directly under the administrator who had officially launched the initiative, and had taken on most of the day-to-day coordination activities for Generation Now. In his early forties with a young family, this administrator was extremely dedicated to his own career, the university, and Generation Now.

My time with Generation Now consisted of attending nine formal meetings with higher education administrators and others directly involved with the initiative and twelve meetings with students from state university marketing classes that used Generation Now as a case study. During these meetings I was a participant-observer, and several times was directly involved in helping to complete a task. For example, during the early phase of the initiative when they were surveying college students and alumni regarding their feelings about the state, I helped by contacting college alumni offices and making sure the survey was distributed to all students and alumni at the same time. I also helped administrators to prepare some reports regarding survey

results. Administrators included my participation with the students in their white paper, which explained the marketing students "will work closely with [administrator] and Emily Porschitz, a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts who volunteered to assist with the initiative and will be using elements of this as part of her dissertation research." Although I was often with the students, typically I tried to stay in the background. The students and professors did ask my opinion about their work at times; in those cases I tried to take the role of a supporter, making small suggestions, but mostly praising their ideas and progress.

I also attended five public events where the initiative was promoted (e.g., Chambers of Commerce breakfasts and a state human resources conference). This helped me to understand the details of the public message of the initiative, and a sense of the many and very varied public opinions about the project. Furthermore, I attended four meetings of a Governor's task force formulated to address young worker retention in the state. This task force was closely linked to Generation Now through people and resources; observing their work was part of tracing outwards to the ruling relations.

I wrote fieldnotes during much of my time in the field. Many of the events and meetings I attended were conducive to openly taking notes, and typically I would transcribe these notes into more formal field notes within a day or two of the event. The interviews and focus groups I conducted were recorded and personally transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. In institutional ethnographic work keeping one's data within its original context is important, rather than pulling out sound bites and sorting them into separate themes as is done in some qualitative methodologies. Keeping the data in context allows researchers to continually look for ways that what they are seeing is connected to external institutional mandates.

My observations of these meetings and public events resulted in two hundred and forty-one single-spaced typed pages of fieldnotes, which were written using techniques from Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). I also gathered approximately thirty documents produced by Generation Now, including websites, reports, PowerPoint slides, press releases and white papers. During this time I also collected articles from newspapers and magazines about the initiative. As I was always taking notes, several times I was asked to record meeting notes and distribute those later. In those cases I would write my fieldnotes, and then prepare a meeting summary for the participants separately. During the last year of the initiative, I was paid several thousand dollars for some work that I did with the initiative. This work primarily consisted of doing research on the state and the housing, jobs, and entertainment opportunities it offered to young workers. Some of this information has since been posted on the public website that was the culmination of Generation Now.

Interviews with Young Students and Workers

Concurrently with observations of Generation Now, I interviewed four young professionals, which resulted in twenty single-spaced pages of transcripts. I asked this group questions about the choices they had made, what they liked and didn't like about the state, and their future plans. These experiences with self-proclaimed young professionals, several of whom had founded young professionals' networks offered insight into the "official discourse" of being a young professional. These individuals had had fairly privileged backgrounds however, and due to the controversy I had seen surrounding Generation Now, I wanted to get the perspective of students and workers who did not have family money or elite educations.

I arranged for focus groups and interviews with a number of first-generation college students at several institutions. The first-generation students were the first in their families to

attend college, and this group offered me more insight into the difficulties that can arise for a large number of students as they make first, a transition from high school to college, and second, a transition from college into a career.

The career counseling office at a small college agreed to support my research, and sent an email to all first generation students on campus, asking them if they would be willing to participate. Those who wished to participate were directed to contact me directly. Forty-seven students responded to this email blast, and from there, I was able to arrange for two focus groups, one with ten, and a second with eight students, as well as eight individual one-on-one interviews. The focus groups and interviews resulted in ninety-eight pages of transcripts and field notes.

Concurrently, I also conducted two focus groups with students (from various backgrounds, not all first-generation) at another institution, the city campus of the state university. This campus has primarily non-traditional students who hold full-time jobs and have families in addition to attending school. Talking to students from the rural liberal arts school and the city university campus gave me a perspective on school, careers, and the state that looked a bit different from what I had seen at the large state university business school. Because the process of applying to schools, paying for college, and choosing a major and a career were often described as difficult by the first-generation students, talking to them helped me to better understand the step-by-step process that is required to be a young professional.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured; I posed open ended questions, often asking participants to expand on points that seemed most interesting, disturbing, or problematic to them. I also tried to build the interviews upon one another, bringing things I had learned from previous interviews into subsequent conversations (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). I asked the interviewees questions about how and why they had decided to go to college, how they choose

their major and/or career path, and about the processes of applying, registering for classes, finding a major, finding internships and their work experience. I asked them about the level of support they had received from family, peers, professors, and career counselors. I also asked where they planned to go after college, where their friends planned to go, and their perceptions of the job market.

Interviews with Business Leaders

I also used semi-structured interviewing techniques for my interviews with six human resources managers and business leaders around the state. These interviews resulted in fifteen pages of interview transcripts. I also attended a conference and two workshops where state business leaders were discussing their hiring needs, and present here representative data from those interviews and events, which resulted in twelve single-spaced pages of field notes. See Appendix for a complete list of fieldwork activities and interviews.

The Researcher in the Field

As described at the beginning of this chapter, throughout this research I was constantly negotiating and renegotiating my shifting status. Rather than being a complete "outsider" to the research site, I was from the area and was connected indirectly to some of the people I encountered. As someone who could be considered a "young professional," I was involved—as an academic and a researcher, a person whose position in the project was legitimized through my status as a "PhD student," and also as a true "participant-observer." I helped the project by coordinating meetings, sending out reminders, and typing up meeting notes, and was paid for some of my work. Trying to understand my own relationship to the ruling relations connected to Generation Now became an important task. While trying to work from the standpoint of the small hero, I was also, at times, part of the ruling-relations.

The tension between the perspectives of small heroes and ruling relations is felt by many institutional ethnographers, as it is impossible for any researchers to separate themselves entirely from ruling relations. As Grahame and Grahame (2009) (both institutional ethnographers) explained, ruling relations are complex and constantly shifting spatially; they "do not have a straightforward inside and outside, but involve a complex series of locations articulated to each other" (Grahame & Grahame, 2009: 296). While never fully resolved, this tension can lessen somewhat as institutional ethnographers move from the field to the analysis and mapping phase. As Grahame and Grahame explained,

> Researchers addressing institutional realities face a different set of challenges than more traditional ethnographers: the classical fieldwork situation is not irrelevant but it cannot remain the primary focus if one is concerned to explore social relations that extend beyond cultural understandings that are constitutive for a given locale. In that case, attention shifts from translation to mapping, and the local encounter of insider and outsider broadens into a wider exploration of the coordinative process and extended forms of organization that shape the social landscape. (310)

As institutional ethnographers are ultimately focused on social relations that originate externally to specific individuals and research sites, their relationships to research participants are not central to analyses.

The next four chapters describe the data collected and analysis, including a map of the social relations of new careers. Chapter 4 starts from the viewpoint of the young students and workers who were responding to Generation Now at the beginning of the participant-observation research stage. It then moves on to uncover the context of Generation Now, describing how the

initiative was only one of many regional efforts to attract young people. The early efforts of Generation Now are presented as a case study, in order to show how new careers and young professional subjectivity can be textualized and incorporated into university and state governmental processes.

CHAPTER 4

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEW CAREERS:

MARKETING A REGION TO YOUNG WORKERS

Introduction

The regional leaders who launched Generation Now were hardly unique in their focus on brain drain, as similar efforts appear in other areas around the world. Over the past several decades regional leaders have found building and maintaining thriving regional economies within the global marketplace to be crucial. Some places are proving to be much more effective than others at attracting and maintaining successful business communities (MacLeod 2001; Saxenian 1994, 1996), and the more "high-profile regional economies and urban metropoles" (MacLeod 2001; 804) (such as, for example, Silicon Valley) are leaving other places behind in the battle for regional wealth, increasing the perceived need for regional development actions in other locations around the globe.

This chapter next describes the pressures for economic development that are put upon regional leaders around the globe. Economic development programs have become critical to the work of state leaders as they are forced to contend with the neoliberal practices of global competition. Regional economic development is currently at least as much a discursive practice as it is a practice of making actual change (Peck, 2005). Here I demonstrate how Generation Now, and other similar initiatives launched around the world, act as shells for those discursive practices of regional development which position skilled knowledge workers as the central economic resource.

Past research has shown that the changes made in development programs are often for the benefit of segments of the population that already control large amounts of wealth, while other, struggling populations are ignored. Generation Now is an example of how a marketing program to attract and retain workers can be launched by state leaders and become part of the public discourse – despite the many contradictions inherent in implementing a marketing program in lieu of other more comprehensive structural changes.

While many state residents were supportive of Generation Now, my early encounters with the initiative indicated that some young students and workers in the state were struggling in their attempts to launch careers in the state. This group questioned the effectiveness of a marketing initiative as a solution to the issues they faced. While the launching of the initiative was part of a state-wide series of discussions with many involved recognizing the need for more workforce housing, greater funding for public education, and more structural connections among education and jobs in the state, these ideas were ultimately not addressed by Generation Now. The initiative solely focused on marketing. This chapter discusses Generation Now as one example of a state regional economic development program. It demonstrates, through the example of a survey developed by Generation Now leaders, how the initiative was a process of textualizing the ruling relations of regional economic development.

The University, Regional Growth and Subjectivity

Programs implemented to strengthen regional economies have tended to focus on continual economic growth and international competition, with specific goals including adding or increasing particular educational opportunities, creating jobs and attracting more workers, improving technological infrastructure, incubating and attracting new high-tech business, rebranding manufacturing companies into technology companies, expanding the local tax base

through place marketing, fostering small firm growth and attracting new forms of investment (Leitner, 1990; Zimmerman, 2008). Analyses of the consequences of these programs show mixed results; there is evidence that they are typically beneficial only to regional elites - they fail to live up to promises to expand opportunities for multiple segments of the population (Houston, Findlay, Harrison, & Mason, 2008; Zimmerman, 2008) and often come at the expense of retaining or growing social infrastructure (MacLeod, 2001). The perceived need for implementing local economic development programs has not, however, diminished as a result of these studies (Zimmerman, 2008).

Universities have not been shielded from these trends or conditions. The focus on regional economic strength and competition has impacted the larger role of regional universities. While earlier mandates for public education had a greater emphasis on promoting a democratic citizenry, now the primary objectives for education are creating an appropriate workforce for our current economy (Mitchell, 2001, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Higher education now focuses on creating workers who are motivated by "understandings of global competitiveness, and the necessity to strategically adapt as an individual to rapidly shifting personal and national contexts" (Mitchell, 2003: 388).

Olds and Thrift (2005) undertook research on state education policy and economic development in Singapore. In their research they demonstrated how the Singaporean state was aligned with business interests, so it became a state imperative to engage in "the mass production of knowledgeable and enterprising subjects, subjects who can simultaneously optimize their relationship to themselves and to work" (Olds & Thrift, 2005: 286). This has been accomplished through offshoots of "elite" North American MBA programs opening to train Singaporean professionals. The new higher education programs "were recognized by the Singaporean state as

playing a fundamental role in restructuring the economy via the refashioning of the local citizenry" (Olds & Thrift, 2005: 279).

As the small nation has transitioned into an international consumer economy, the government has redefined who counts as a "worthy citizen" (Olds & Thrift, 2005: 271) and sought to create "a new breed of Singaporean" (Olds & Thrift, 2005: 279) through new educational models. These new enterprising subjects created in Singapore are then, in turn, re-shaping the state. The state's promotion of higher education models that create a new kind of citizen/worker, have set in motion, according to Olds and Thrift, "new forms of governmentality that privilege the mass production of knowledgeable and enterprising subjects, subjects who can simultaneously optimize their relationship to themselves and to work" (Olds & Thrift, 2005: 286).

Olds' and Thrift's (2005) research is one example of ethnographic work that demonstrated how individuals are the primary resources for economic development in the knowledge economy in Singapore. Other work focusing on higher education in Europe (Mitchell, 2003), and the United States (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) has also enhanced our understanding of the changing relationships among regional governments, business communities, and universities. Changes in the financial structures of educational institutions are driving the changing goals. Many scholars have expressed concern over the growing commercialization of universities and the proliferation of for-profit colleges and universities (Mars, Slaughter & Rhoades, 2008; Roosevelt, 2006). Many schools have forged tighter connections with corporations, and are under greater pressure to create market value. Entrepreneurial ventures by faculty, administrators and students within universities are now common (Mars, Slaughter & Rhoades 2008; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

Generation Now: A Marketing Path to Regional Economic Growth

The university administrators who launched Generation Now also needed to legitimize the university's position in the state. Following is an excerpt from a white paper written by a university administrator that explains the background of the initiative and shows its goal of economic development in the region.

> **Background:** [Generation Now] was developed as a result of the outreach activities conducted by [the university] and a proactive response to begin addressing the concerns being expressed. In 2005, [the university] began taking a more active role in reaching out to and engaging with the business community to become a "partner of choice," one of the key components of the [university] mission statement. The [university] surveyed the business community regarding their perception of the system and working relations. Based on the findings, [the university] established business liaisons at each of the campuses and in the Chancellor's office to serve as a single point of entry for businesses or organizations. [University] staff scheduled meetings with Chambers of Commerce, the State's Department of Resources and Economic Development, business associations and leaders, and others to gain more information on business expectations of and how [the university] could better address their needs in the state.
>
> [University administrators] attended many of the listening sessions with business leaders held by [the state governor and economic commissioner]. During these sessions and previous meetings, it became very clear that [state] employers are not currently finding the skilled workers they needed to grow their businesses. It

> was also very clear that the growth industries in the state were mainly looking for workers with some education beyond high school. (Generation Now White Paper, 2007)

It was clear that a main goal was to connect to the business community and support regional economic growth. The white paper added:

> Many states have researched their demographics and concluded that an aggressive, targeted effort to retain more of these individuals is vital to their economy. Some states are putting significant financial resources into those efforts, and enacting legislative policies that provide tax credits and other financial incentives for staying. The New England region is particularly hard hit by this exodus, and competition to attract these individuals to different and often neighboring states will likely escalate. As a result, it will be important to review these efforts in terms of their potential in [the state] and monitor their impact in these states. (Generation Now White Paper, 2007)

Generation Now was one of many programs to address the problem of attracting and retaining more young people within a region.

University administrators needed to demonstrate that they could directly serve the current needs of their region's business community. By launching Generation Now, with its specific economic objectives, university administrators were acting on the need to respond to the market-driven competitive economic model of education. As in Singapore and other communities around the globe, a central goal of the government and university was to add the right kinds of workers to the economy so that the region could better compete globally. The initiative modeled

itself as a business unit with measurable goals, as described in a white paper written by university administrators.

The complexities of the population issues facing the state were revealed during the radio program that introduced Generation Now to the public. After the administrator explained the goals of the initiative to encourage more college graduates to stay in the state after graduation he and the host of the program fielded calls from people around the state who had a wide range of questions. One caller told the administrator "one of the largest factors that lead people to leave is the availability of affordable housing. I don't know what you can do about that from the education side." The administrator responded "We can't do a lot from the education side on that problem. Higher Ed needs to join forces with other public policy groups to address this, and it needs to be a piece of our overall plan." Another caller said he had heard some complaints about the quality of high school graduates, and worried that local students were further behind than students from other states. The administrator replied:

> This is a fact, we have some students who are very well prepared, and at the other end, some that are not so well-prepared. We need to be having a sustained discussion with K-12. We are also preparing the majority of teachers in our state [within our university system]. There is a different set of standards for high-school students now, and that needs to be updated constantly. (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2007)

A third caller said, "I want to lament the fact that you regret that so many people leave the state and then come back. We need people who have had a broad experience; we always thought that [our state] is too insular." The administrator responded:

> Wonderful point, my wife and I are living with that reality. I am not trying to capture all of the graduates of our institutions. But, if we have people who are graduating who want to stay if they had a job, we need to close that gap. We do know that those of our students who do an internship are more likely to have links to jobs. (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2007)

Listening to this radio show, I became drawn into the issues facing the region, which ostensibly needed young people, but a perceived lack of jobs, high housing costs and the quality of primary and secondary public education were convincing young residents to try to live and work elsewhere.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I heard critiques of the claim that there were many desirable open jobs in the state. For example, before attending the public events where Generation Now would be presented to the community, I read through the material posted on the university website about the initiative. Generation Now had a blog where administrators posted information about the progress of the initiative. Amongst a group of comments to one blog post praising the initiative and expressing support for the university, was the following statement:

> I think [the university] has a lot to gain monetarily by starting this initiative and therefore any results of their "research" should be scrutinized heavily. The only people that benefit from this initiative are those who have been to college and those who run colleges and as far as I'm concerned that doesn't represent the entire state. (Comment to post on the Generation Now Blog, December 5, 2007)

Along with the critique of the state I heard on the radio station, the particular post caught my attention. Though I had not yet attended one event, it was already evident to me that the initiative was complex and, it seemed, controversial.

Generation Now is an example of a state university/business partnership focused on marketing the state. As an administrator explained at one meeting:

> We want to conduct a tourism-like marketing campaign. We do a good job of marketing [the state] to tourists, why can't we do the same to convince young people to stay here? There are good jobs here, but good potential workers are leaving. The pipes [between the workers and the jobs] aren't connected. (Fieldnotes, Sept. 2007)

As part of the launching of Generation Now, several leaders of young professionals' networks were also invited to speak publicly at Chamber of Commerce events with university administrators, and ideas about what is attractive to young people in the state began to be explored by the participants. A founder of one city's young professionals' network spoke at a public Chamber of Commerce meeting, explaining what he and his organization could add to Generation Now:

> I'm one of the young faces that the [administrator] spoke about. I'm part of a Young Professionals Network that is trying to change the face of [the state]…We need to have an authentic message, and the YP [young professional] networks can help provide that. There are people who look like me and are my age who say "you know what, it's cool to live in [the state]." I can talk about it being a fun, cultural place. The YP groups are where the rubber meets the road for this initiative. We're already talking about how we can connect with businesses and impact the state. (Fieldnotes, Apr. 2007)

The new face of the state was clearly meant to be those of young professionals. Promoting an image of the state as a place where young, college-educated workers can have interesting

lifestyles and successful career paths became the mission of Generation Now. University administrators used several media venues to launch Generation Now. They sent out a press release resulting in articles in several newspapers around the state, and a feature article in the state's business magazine. One administrator also wrote a long editorial published in one of the state's larger newspapers, and was a guest on the public radio station's morning interview program.

After negotiating access to the initiative, I saw administrators serve as panel discussants at three Chamber of Commerce meetings in three different cities – two in the spring and one in the early fall. They took part in discussions about problems faced by the state and presented Generation Now as a potential solution. Several hundred professionals attended each of these meetings, including CEOs, Human Resources representatives, and other business leaders, as well as city and state government members. Panel participants included university administrators, demographers, officials from the state's department of economic development, business leaders, consultants, and leaders of local Young Professionals Networks. Each meeting took place in a hotel ballroom to accommodate the large crowds.

As with the radio program, the panel discussions at the Chamber of Commerce meetings were focused, not solely on Generation Now, or even a need for young professionals; a wide range of issues was covered at each meeting. Discussion topics included: affordable housing shortages, aging baby boomers, struggles to find workers with particular skills and training, the high student debt accrued by college graduates and the difficulties local companies were having in recruiting people from other states to the region because of issues such as high property taxes, poor-quality public education and lack of cultural activities. Another option discussed was

alternative work schedules that might entice stay-at-home parents and retirees to come back to the workforce part-time.

A demographer and consumer trends expert[3] from the region was at two of these events promoting a book and companion film that would be released the following year. In these talks, and in the forthcoming book and film, the demographer discussed his view of the regional population problem. While studying towns and attending town meetings around the state, the demographer saw that young people were being pushed out of the region because housing prices were too high. While many incentives were provided for the construction of elderly housing, there was nothing comparable for workforce housing. His research helped to bring affordable housing to the forefront of the discussions about brain drain. At the Chamber of Commerce meeting in 2007, the demographer explained some of his concerns.

> I have found that around this state people believe in myths not facts. Myth #1: Growth in [the state] is out of control. At a recent public meeting in [local town] we heard a man say, in public. "What I want in my town is squirrels and deer. We'll never spend any money on squirrels and deer." Well, what I want is people to stand up to people like this and tell them that squirrels and deer aren't going to be driving the ambulances and working in the hospitals to take care of them when they're older. Even immigrants are not coming to the state the way they used to. Growth is slowing to almost nothing. The primary reason for this is the lack of anything approaching affordable housing for young people. It's not the children's fault when taxes go up. People don't understand that building child-proof housing

[3] Name hidden to keep location confidential.

> will not make your taxes go up or down. Costs are rising for other reasons. People think that when 100 new houses are built there will be 200 new children in the school, but the fact is that 100 new houses only add 50 kids at most to a school, and that is over a long period of time. (Fieldnotes, Sept. 2007)

Local communities, according to the demographer, were actively pushing young people out because the residents did not want the costs of public education in their towns to rise. The region's property taxes were used to fund local public schools, so rising school costs leads directly to higher taxes. The demographer saw the tax structure as one reason for an unbalanced community, where ultimately there would not be enough workers to care for the elderly population who did receive financial encouragement to move to and remain in the state. The demographer's research was brought up often by administrators and business leaders in the later discussions about Generation Now, and the demographer's film ultimately included several minutes of discussion about the initiative.

In the fall of 2007 a second demographer spoke at a Generation Now meeting and at a Chamber of Commerce meeting and explained, according to his research, young people from the region weren't leaving, but rather the current population between 20 and 24 consisted of a smaller cohort. The next youngest cohort was much bigger, so the population of early 20 year-olds would be increasing in a few years. "Any suggestion that [the state] is losing their 20-29 year olds is not accurate," the second demographer explained. This demographer was well respected in the state, but state leaders carried on telling their story that the state was in desperate need of more young workers. The discrepancies between the two constructions of the demography of the state indicate that the "facts" about the needs of the state were not clear. The

narratives shaped by state leaders were not resting on one proven truth, but rather on the data that helped to support the need for regional economic development.

The regional leaders at the Chamber of Commerce meetings talked about how brain drain – young college-educated people leaving the state – was a serious, multifaceted and complex problem, and many solutions for addressing the issue were discussed. Providing incentives for workforce housing, keeping retirees, reducing student debt, and better internship programs that would provide students with stronger links to the business community were some of the options discussed. Some also believed that better education and training for high school and community college graduates would enable those populations to find better employment and fill the needs of many local corporations. However, most of the discussions focused on college-educated young workers as the answer to the state's economic future. At one Chamber of Commerce meeting, a member of the state government's department of economic development summarized what many were saying:

> It's going to take a lot to make sure that in five or ten years we can still talk about our wonderful economy. Things are changing. It used to be that two-thirds of the people who moved here had Bachelor's degrees, but that's not the case anymore.[4] There are a lot of good jobs here that are going unfilled. (Fieldnotes, Apr. 2007)

The consensus was that more people with Bachelor's degrees were needed in the state, and attracting more college graduates was going to be the primary solution to the perceived need for more workers in the state.

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[4] This is, I believe, a (slightly veiled) reference to the rising number of Hispanic immigrants to the region.

My fieldwork began after the university administrators were involved in this discussion and pitching their idea for Generation Now; however I was able to see that the focus on the population with Bachelor's degrees was one indication as to why the University leaders were taking a prominent role in the state-wide discussion about the region's population problems. The administrators explained that business leaders were reaching out directly to the university system, asking for help. One of the administrators was quoted in a local newspaper:

> Four years ago in [the state], [a large insurance company], which employs 5,500 people, came to higher education leaders with a complaint: They couldn't find enough qualified candidates to fill the company's jobs. "That was the 'a-ha' moment for us," said [an administrator]. "At the same time we were hearing from students that there weren't enough jobs here for them when they graduated. We had to figure out where this became a perception versus reality issue." (2007, Source hidden for confidentiality)

I found clues to another reason behind the university's launch of Generation Now at a small private meeting I attended in 2008. At this meeting an administrator expressed frustration with a report on the state just issued by one of the state government offices. He complained that the report was 300 pages long, yet failed to mention higher education at all. The other university administrators at the meeting agreed that this was a big problem, and another administrator said he would make some phone calls about it. The state university was underfunded, and clearly, resources within the government and the university were scarce. Generation Now, it was hoped by administrators, would provide publicity and an avenue for more money and resources to flow into the university.

The specific objectives of Generation Now had been set before the Chamber of Commerce discussions I witnessed; to add more recent college graduates - and thus more money - to the regional economy. Following are figures an administrator quoted in early discussions of Generation Now:

> If we were to keep fifty-five percent (of local college graduates) here it could have a forty-two million dollar impact annually, taking into consideration average salary, and an addition of thirty-two hundred new workers and six-hundred thirty-six million dollars over five years. You may quibble with my numbers, but I just want to make the point that this initiative could make a real difference in our economy.
>
> To achieve this, we are hoping to partner with businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and social networking groups. I would like to launch a tourism-like marketing campaign to get this project going. I do want to emphasize that I know a large number of young people will, of course, leave. My own children are living abroad right now. We are educating our young people for a global economy and they are beginning to believe us!" (Fieldnotes, Sept. 2007)

The administrators needed to advance the position of higher education in the state, and the way to achieve that was through connections to business and commerce.

Formulating the Subject: Surveying Young Students and Workers

As part of the process of launching the initiative, the administrators announced that they would be distributing a survey to college students and recent alumni about their choices and behaviors regarding their careers and place of residence. Two internet-based surveys were created by the initiative leaders and the university's survey center - one for current students and one for alumni.

Figure 3. Survey Excerpt

8. What are your immediate plans after graduating?

- ☐ Work in field of study
- ☐ Work in any job until find employment in field of study
- ☐ Begin graduate school
- ☐ Raise a family
- ☐ Travel
- ☐ Military service
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

9. Do you want to remain in [the state] upon graduation?

- ☐ Definitely NO
- ☐ Probably NO
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Probably YES
- ☐ Definitely YES

10. If you are planning to leave [the state] upon graduation, please tell us why? (please be as specific as possible)

11. If you plan on moving to another state to work after graduating from college, would you ever consider moving back to in the future?

- ☐ Definitely NO
- ☐ Probably NO
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Probably YES
- ☐ Definitely YES
- ☐ I don't plan on moving to another state

12. To what extent do you believe there are job opportunities in your field of study in [the state]?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Few
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Many
- ☐ Very Many

The administrators developed a list of questions, and a statistician from the survey center created Likert-scales for many of the responses. Some questions also asked for short answer responses (see Figure 3 for an excerpt from the survey).

Figure 4 shows the process of survey creation, distribution, data analysis and presentation of the data. Once the surveys were created, university and college presidents were enlisted to support their distribution. State college and university presidents agreed to inform their career center counselors and alumni office administrators of the upcoming survey. An administrator then worked directly with those in the career centers and alumni offices to distribute the survey electronically and follow up twice over the course of several weeks to ensure that the participants completed the surveys. To answer most questions the respondents clicked the multiple choice answer that they felt best fit their experience. There was a response rate of about 6% with approximately 2000 students and 1000 alumni completing one of the surveys. The administrators remarked to one another at one point that this was a low response rate, but they still had statistical significance. The raw data were compiled automatically by the survey center's software.

I attended a meeting regarding the data analysis of the survey results in late 2007. A statistician from the survey center and a university administrator met to discuss the first draft of the survey's results. I observed in this meeting that several lines of thinking about the needs and preferences of young students and workers had to be dropped because the results of the survey did not support them. For example, before the survey was distributed in several public meetings the university administrators had discussed the importance of internships, claiming they were a great way to help keep students in the state because they connected them to local businesses and potential jobs after graduation. The survey results showed, however, that students who had

internships were not more likely to stay, so increased internships as a potential solution was dropped.

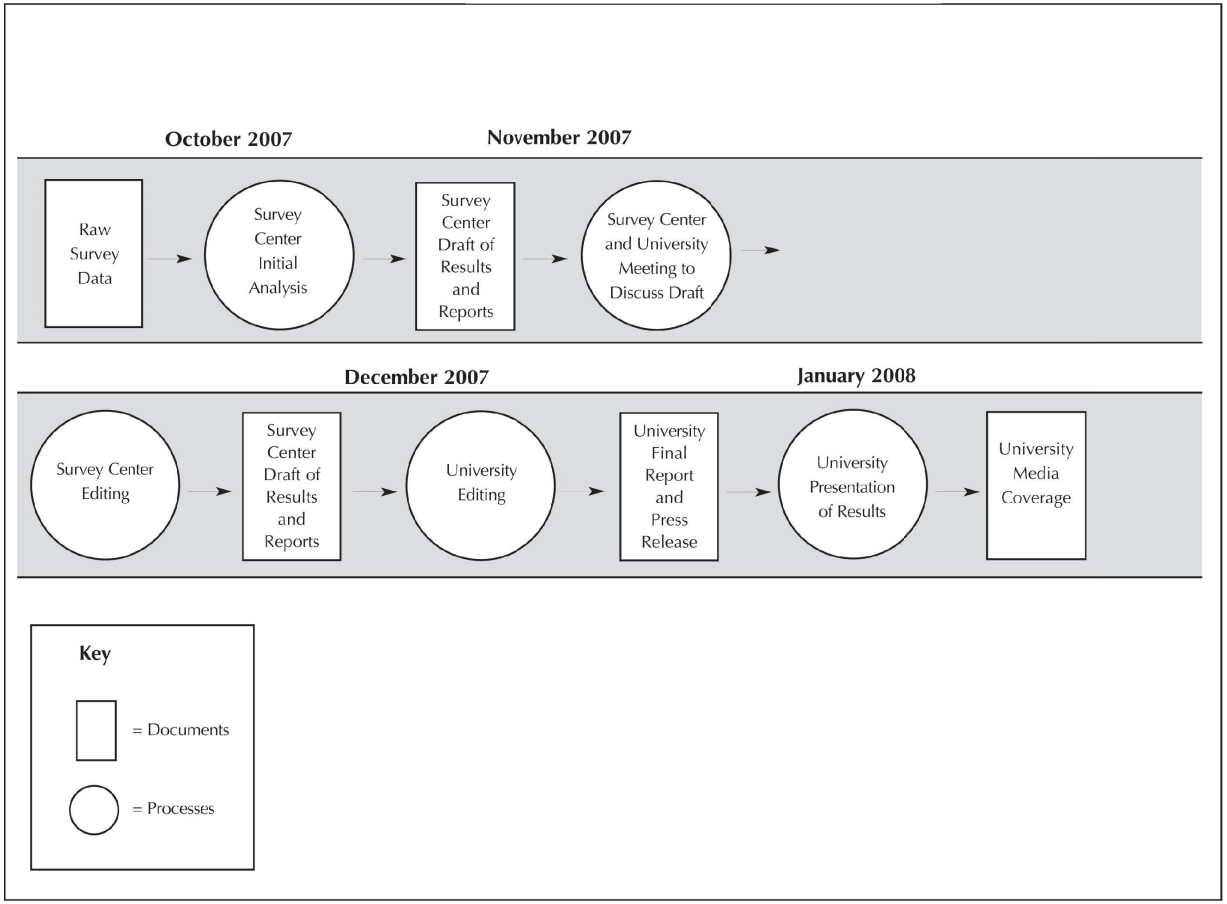
The discussion of the high price of housing as an important reason that young people were leaving the region was another narrative that had been central to the work of state leaders before the survey results were analyzed. The survey results indicated that housing price was only a factor for 18% of those who choose to leave. Thus, university administrators were able to conclude that housing was not a central issue affecting the decisions of young people, so this topic was also set aside as a major part of the problem and solution.

The survey results ultimately were used to support the original marketing goals of the initiative and were also helpful in making peripheral some of the more complex structural issues such as housing and internships. The survey showed that there was a target market and the major issue was now "perceptions" that needed to be changed and those could be re-shaped through a marketing campaign.

Students as Consumers: The Target Market

In 2007 university administrators took part in discussions around the state about the

Figure 4. The Survey Process



region's declining population of young people and introduced a plan to help market the state as an attractive place to start a career after graduating from college. By launching Generation Now the administrators were able to help shape the discussion and play a significant role in defining the nature of the problem as an economic one. Generation Now became the solution to the problem of needing young professional workers.

The initiative itself, its goals and proposed solutions to the state's population problem, highlighted the changing relationships among state governments and students. Universities need to cater to business communities and act as solution-oriented entrepreneurial economic entities. As universities become more business-like, students fill roles of consumers and co-entrepreneurs, positioning themselves as the economic future of the state. Students are now consumers, and the role that the regional public university played needed to be justified economically.

As the objectives of public education have shifted, so have the relationships among university staff and the students. As most organizational life is now viewed through the lens of competitive market economies, there is greater employment of the "students as consumers" (McMillan & Cheney, 1996: 120) model of public education. McMillan and Cheney (1996) explained that, while there is nothing inherently wrong with using the metaphors of market and consumerism in public education, its impact on the philosophy, goals, and resources of organizations that adopt the metaphor, and the limits of its usefulness need to be recognized. McMillan and Cheney argued that the consumer model of education reinforces the notion of individual success at the expense of community. Students are taught that they must "get ahead" (implying that others will be left behind), because resources are scarce. Rather than working

towards community and cooperation, students are encouraged to focus on their own personal success.

The process of surveying university seniors and alumni was the university's first big effort. The survey was executed just as a marketing firm would collect data about their potential market. At one meeting, an administrator pointed out that one of the undergraduate campuses had not responded to his request to distribute the survey to their students. He explained that he was not going to send a second request, because that student body was primarily composed of continuing education students and adult learners. That school "is not our target market," he explained. Only those individuals who could fit the marketing category of "young professional" were targets of Generation Now.

The work of the initiative discussed in this section, where a survey was distributed, completed and analyzed, is representative of the type of information gathering that was done by the leaders of Generation Now. University leaders sought input from the public, but they had a marketing agenda and asked only some people and used a specific format. The survey had the purpose of determining which factors were most influential on young people's decisions about where to live and work – and it was formatted to fit the discourses of scientific consumer research and marketing so that the survey results could then be inserted in conversations about regional economic growth. The survey was created in order to enter into a certain conversation and its creators had a specific motive – to identify and attract workers who engage in enterprising careers.

The survey questions asked participants to think about their future, to describe their plans for where they were going next and what they were going to do – in other words, they were required, during the course of checking boxes to act as enterprising career-oriented consumers of

college education and place of residence. In engaging with this survey text, which made reference to very complex life choices, participants were asked by the survey to focus their lives into simplistic answers. Thus, the complicated decision making processes of college seniors were simplified, and life choices were constructed as both purposeful and compatible with the larger rationality of enterprising culture. Those who had not yet made decisions about career and place of residence were now the "target market."

Career-oriented students and young-professionals were framed as the target market to "purchase" the lifestyles and careers the region had to offer. The results of the survey were analyzed with the goal of assessing how to successfully market to enterprising young workers/consumers who choose their own paths and build their own careers; therefore making sales pitches was the role of regional leaders.

From the conversations I witnessed early in the days of the initiative however, I saw that that Generation Now was not universally embraced. Many were asking for real structural change, and Generation Now could potentially have been an effort to offer more social structure and public resources to students. By examining how the project unfolded, it becomes possible to see a focus on economic growth was not inevitable; there were other ways that university administrators and state leaders could have understood the changing population issue and means of addressing it. These were put aside in favor of a marketing solution.

After the survey results were announced in the press, the university administrators began to see their work pay off and their public presence was increased. After a public report on the state's economic future an administrator mentioned to me, "I just went to the 2008 [state government] report, and we were mentioned three times there. There're just constant mentions of us everywhere."

The next chapter turns the focus onto young students and workers – current and future young professionals – the "small heroes" of this research. The everyday lives and experiences of this population are discussed, starting from the young professionals who were directly connected to Generation Now and working to promote the initiative, and moving to the lives of first-generation college students, many of whom faced large obstacles in their quests to attend college and build a career. From there, this research traces outwards to understand the external social relations of young professionalism, connecting the broad discursive practices of regional economic development to the everyday lives of young students and workers.

CHAPTER 5

STARTING FROM THE "YOUNG PROFESSIONALS"

If more graduates stayed, they would make [the state] a "younger" state, contributing to the cultural landscape, further stimulating and developing entrepreneurial ideas, and possibly attracting more young people from out of state to come to [our state]. (Higher Education administrator, quoted in newspaper article, 2007).

There's no reason why you can't succeed here. If you go to [a major city] you're going to be with 150,000 other young people. Here you don't have that kind of competition, so building a successful career can be much easier. (Young Professional speaking to college students)

Introduction

Young professionals were, according to the leaders of Generation Now in 2007, crucial to the future of the state. This chapter focuses first on self-described "young professionals," who spoke out for Generation Now at public events. The stories of three young professionals who were directly a part of Generation Now are presented, each one of them well-versed in the language of the new economy and the expectations placed on young professionals by both their work organizations and the state. In this chapter the accepted narrative of how to become a young professional is closely examined and linked to the ruling relations of competitive regional economic development. I show how those relations coordinate actions and strengthen class distinctions. The power of the external relations of economic development plays out in local settings as people adapt to the particularities of being a young professional.

The next section of this chapter focuses on the stories of first-generation college students and young professionals (members of the first generation in their families to attend college or university). The four participants highlighted in this section express frustration and resistance against all they are asked to do throughout the process of becoming young professionals. Attending to their stories reveals the hidden work involved, and shows how the accepted narratives of young professionalsim hide many difficulties intrinsic to young workers today.

Finally, this chapter uncovers the various new economy ideologies underlying the social organization of the concept of "young professionalism." I discuss how young professionals are meant to embody the ideal workers for current economic conditions, so that regional leaders look to young college-educated workers as they develop plans for their regions to compete in the global economy. This section examines connections among the young professional discourse and ideas such as the new global economy, economic growth and regional development, elite identities, enterprising selves and self-managed careers. When these links are made visible, it is possible to see, as regional leaders create and attract young professionals, how states are relieved of the pressure to provide certain kinds of infrastructure because young professionals are workers who are considered to be self-reliant and able to take care of themselves. While young professionals are often described as being flexible or risk-tasking as if those qualities are part of their internal psychological make-ups, this chapter makes visible how they are actually coordinated by external ideologies to act as if they embody those qualities. The discourse of young professionalism can hide the complexities and complications for a young person trying to create a stable social and economic future.

The Young Professionals Helping to Sell the State

Generation Now was an initiative dedicated to trying to retain more young people in the state after they graduated from a local college or university. The leaders of young professionals' networks around the state were crucial partners with the leaders of the initiatives in promoting the state as a good place for young people to live and Generation Now as a useful initiative. The following three stories are from leaders of young professionals' networks who spoke at public events about their lives and the young professionals' networks. I use the words of these young people to uncover the complex "official" discourse of the state which promoted the state as a good place for a young person to launch a successful career.

"Where aren't my friends going?"

Gary grew up and attended an exclusive private high school in the state before he went away to top-tier undergraduate and law schools in other parts of the country. After becoming a lawyer, Gary moved back to his home state. Here he discusses some of the very practical, career-oriented reasons he found for moving back to the region.

> I grew up in [the state] and went to [elite private school in the state]. I went to [elite public university in another state] for undergraduate school, and [elite private university in another state] for a law degree. After graduation I started trying to decide where to live. I was thinking "Do I want to live in [a large metropolis] or do I want to live near my family? I thought at the time that the way to be successful is to start where you're going to end up, so you have value based on your network. There's a big comparative advantage to starting out in [the state] and having the contacts and opportunities here. I have a big comparative

> advantage to my friends who were all going to [major cities]. I said to myself, "where aren't my friends going? That's where I can make an impact."

Gary recognized how important the network he already had established could be to his career. When he analyzed his future, he realized that he would have a better chance of competing economically in a place where there were both fewer elites and an existing personal network.

Gary was not willing, however, to sacrifice immediate financial success for the future promises a strong local network might offer. He explained to a group of students how he had determined that a salary in [the state] was comparable to what he might be able to earn in a larger, more metropolitan region.

> What I did was just plug the numbers into a salary converter, I 'googled it up.' In [the city] $125,000 gave me the same buying power as $70,000 in [here in the state]. I wanted to know if I was totally stupid for considering a $65,000 salary when I was being offered $125,000. The numbers look so different... It was a really short time before I started to make money and thought that buying a house was affordable. Here it's three, four, or five years. In an urban area it's more like ten or fifteen.

For Gary, the state offered an opportunity to develop a financially successful career more quickly than he could have in the city. Even though his salary would be lower, he wouldn't need as much money to buy a house, and the connections he had in the state were extremely valuable.

Gary was also unwilling to sacrifice the diversity and culture offered in urban areas. Here Gary tells college students that the small city where he lives does offer a certain amount of urban culture that appeals to him. The fact that traditional farming images of the state are still dominant is frustrating for Gary.

> We have this image of [the state] that it's old and boring. What do you think of when you think of [the state]? You think of that pastoral image, church steeples. These images don't speak to urban flavor. There are not a lot of tourism dollars going to how fun it is in [my small city]. We have sushi, Thai, Pan Asian food. It's not as big as New York City, but we do have a little bit of everything. And that's what I need, I don't need forty different sushi restaurants, I just need one good one that I like.

Gary was one of the founders of the young professionals' network in his small city. Here he tells a group of business leaders at a Chamber of Commerce event the origins of the network and how it has completely transformed his life.

> I was here in [the state] in my twenties and there was a sense that I wasn't wanted. I felt that people were trying to tell me to go away for a while, and maybe come back in when I'm thirty-five or forty and can afford a big house. I feel that the culture here is one that doesn't want young people. I grew up here, but all my friends had left. I was working in [my small city], and I started talking to people about where the younger people are, I went to the Chamber of Commerce and different places in the city and eventually eleven of us met at [a local restaurant] and decided to start [the local young professionals network]. I was looking for a social life outside of work. To tell you the truth I was hoping to meet ladies. We talked about how no one was providing a venue for young people to meet each other. We started the young professionals' network, and pretty quickly we had a hundred to a hundred and fifty people at events. A lot of organizations were

willing to give us space to exist. I'm married now, I met my wife through the young professionals, and she met three of her bridesmaids through the network.

Gary was clearly successful in his quest to "meet the ladies," but the authenticity of the group he helped to found can still be questioned.

The opportunities the young professionals' network offer are not superficial, based solely on exchanging contact information, but also offers opportunities for real engagement and lifelong relationships to form. All three of the young professionals stressed the importance of their "YP" network, and networking is central to earning the professional status of the type Gary desired (Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson, 2006) While Gary seems comfortable with the relationships his networking has given him, his story suggests how Gary's "personal" life is deeply intertwined with his "professional" life (Anderson-Gough et al, 2006).

The network in the state's small city was not simply about forming relationships, but also about training people to be young professionals. Here Gary continues his story to business leaders.

> At one of our early events two hundred people showed up, and that's when I realized that this is an idea whose time had come. People my age were looking for a place to belong. This network helps people who are new, people who want to become part of a community. We have business events, social events, and cultural events like wine tasting. We just had one called "mixology" where we learned how to mix a great martini.

The network offered young people work and social tools they would need to be part of the "professional" class. The networking and training opportunities were a place where younger

people and younger images of the state could be created and disseminated. Gary explained the value of these networks to local business leaders.

> We need to have an authentic message, and the YP [young professional] networks can help provide that. There are people who look like me and are my age and say 'you know what, it's cool to live in [the state].' I can talk about it being a fun, cultural place. The YP groups are where the rubber meets the road for this initiative. We're already talking about how we can connect with businesses and impact the state.

The young professional networks provide real tools (networking and training), but perhaps more significant is the "authentic message" promoting the region as a viable option for young people in the state. Just as being a professional in today's career landscape requires a particular image, the state itself also needs a complementary image. Gary's experiences and observations supported the tenet that professional skills and lifestyles offered by the young professionals' networks could shape the state's image.

"I started my own company."

Robin, another young professional, spoke to current college students at an event to promote the state's small city. She spoke first of her early career in a much larger city several hours from her home state.

> I got into [an elite private university] in [major city] and headed there for college, and ended up living [there] for about 12 years. Loved every minute of it. But, I finally had a bit of what you might call a quarter-life crisis, except I had it a little bit late. I was turning thirty, and was headed to Vegas to celebrate. Woo-hoo [laughs]! But anyway, I stopped at an ATM machine to get some money, and

> when I read the bank receipt I realized I only had about $75.00 left in my account. I mean, everything was paid, it wasn't a big deal, but I just thought, you know what? I'm so tired of this. I'm so tired of not being able to get ahead, not get anywhere. I was working for the mayor of [major city], I was really well connected in the city, but I just felt like I couldn't quite get my career to really take off there.

Robin describes her career in the large metropolis as successful in terms of her network, but unsuccessful financially. She decided at that moment to go home and figure out a next step.

> So, when I got home I actually moved home to my parent's house in [state's small city], and found out that, you know what, there's a lot going on here. I kinda like it here. I've been able to work my way up here in the last 6 years, and I've been able to do two things that I really wouldn't be able to do for a long time yet if I hadn't stayed [here]. The first is, I bought my own condo. It's right in downtown, in one of the converted mill buildings, it's got exposed brick walls, everything, and I can walk to everywhere. The second is, I started my own company. I have a marketing consulting company that I started a year ago, and you know what, I'm doing it! I paid all my bills last year, and it's going really well.

Robin was able to achieve financial success in home state, defined by her as an ability to own her own condominium and business. While she was no longer in a major city, a more "hip" urban area, she surprised even herself by finding that she liked not only the opportunities for financial stability offered in the smaller city, but also the lifestyle. Robin was able to afford an apartment with in a newly gentrified converted industrial mill, with exposed brick walls, a highly-desired sign of a building having character.

Robin also has proved herself to be an entrepreneur, so it's not surprising that she was recruited to speak to the college students. Being a successful entrepreneur is one of the pinnacles of achievement in the new economy, and the myth of the many young entrepreneurs who have achieved great wealth and success in today's new, global economy is still very much alive.

"We're working at the grassroots level"

Christine, a third young professional, spoke at a state-wide human-resources conference to a group of human resources professionals who were learning about Generation Now. They were being asked to find ways that their organizations could support the initiative (especially financially). After one of the university administrators who was working with Generation Now spoke, Christine came up to talk about how the initiative was an official path towards attracting more young people to the state, and that the young professionals themselves are:

> Living it and [attracting young people to the state] on the ground level. We very conveniently found each other. I'm part of the group of young professionals who are here working on our careers, trying to figure out the lay of the land. We're interested in developing ourselves to where we want to be, and we will be the next generation of leaders in [the state], so we're working on that now at the grassroots level.

Christine's focus on the connection between the work of being a young professional and becoming a leader in the state points towards her awareness of state leaders' efforts to affect regional economic change. She presents young professionals' networks as a "grassroots" effort for effective development in the state. Here she discusses one of the important members of her network:

> In our chapter, we have three CEO's. One graduated from the [local large state university], borrowed $4,000 from his parents, and now owns a multi-million dollar company. He just bought a building in [the state's small city] that he's renovating. He's part of the economic revitalization of the city.

She also adds:

> A survey was also done of members of the young professionals organizations, and we found that 89% have college degrees…. Although there are fewer young people [in the state], there are a collection of people here with degrees who are very interested in their careers. These are people who are also committed to their communities. They're looking for something to invest in. I categorically believe that YP's are people who are interested in becoming entrenched in their community and giving back. 58% of the young professional membership in the state owns a house or condo, and a large percentage plans to buy in the next few years. We also asked if anyone would be interested in mentoring recent college graduates, and over 30% said yes.

Christine, Gary and Robin had all grown up locally, gone to college in other states, and came back in their twenties or early thirties (Robin). Growing up in the state's small city, they had seen the area go through a period of decline and begin a period of revitalization. They each had the idea that they could add value to the city during this period of change. In her talk, Christine talks about young professionals as being good for the community. This runs counter to a more self-centered version of career-oriented young professionals as focused only on themselves and making money. She is aware of this other narrative and talks about her work to "debunk" the idea of the disloyal, purely self-interested young professionals from her generation.

> We do have myths to debunk about the flaws in our generation. Recently I was talking to the president of [local utilities corporation], and he said to me, "Christine, why is your generation disloyal? We have people at my company who've been here since they were 21, and now they're running the company, that used to be the way to climb the corporate ladder. What's going on with your generation?" I told him, Tom, my generation is not lazy or disloyal, and we don't have ADD [attention deficit disorder]. I have changed jobs a lot, but it's because I was looking for the best opportunities for my career, I was looking for a company where I could develop and grow. We're looking for a boss who believes in us, and if a company understands that young people want to be engaged and wants to develop and grow, those young people will stay.

Christine's understanding of the impact that young professionals can have in a region complemented the work of Generation Now. Not only was the region a place where young people can achieve personal success, as discussed by Gary and Robin, but it was also a place where the young people were particularly devoted to their careers, and in conjunction, to their communities. Their "work on" their careers would benefit themselves, but more importantly to the rest of the state, would help revitalize certain areas and make a real positive impact on the economic position of the state.

From these interviews, more insights into the young professional discourse can be garnered, and these are explored at the end of this chapter. Figure 3 presents additions to the map of the social relations that was introduced in Chapter 3. From the words of the young professionals, it can be seen that family relationships have a huge impact on the transition into career and the workplace. This is further illustrated in the next section, in which I turn to stories

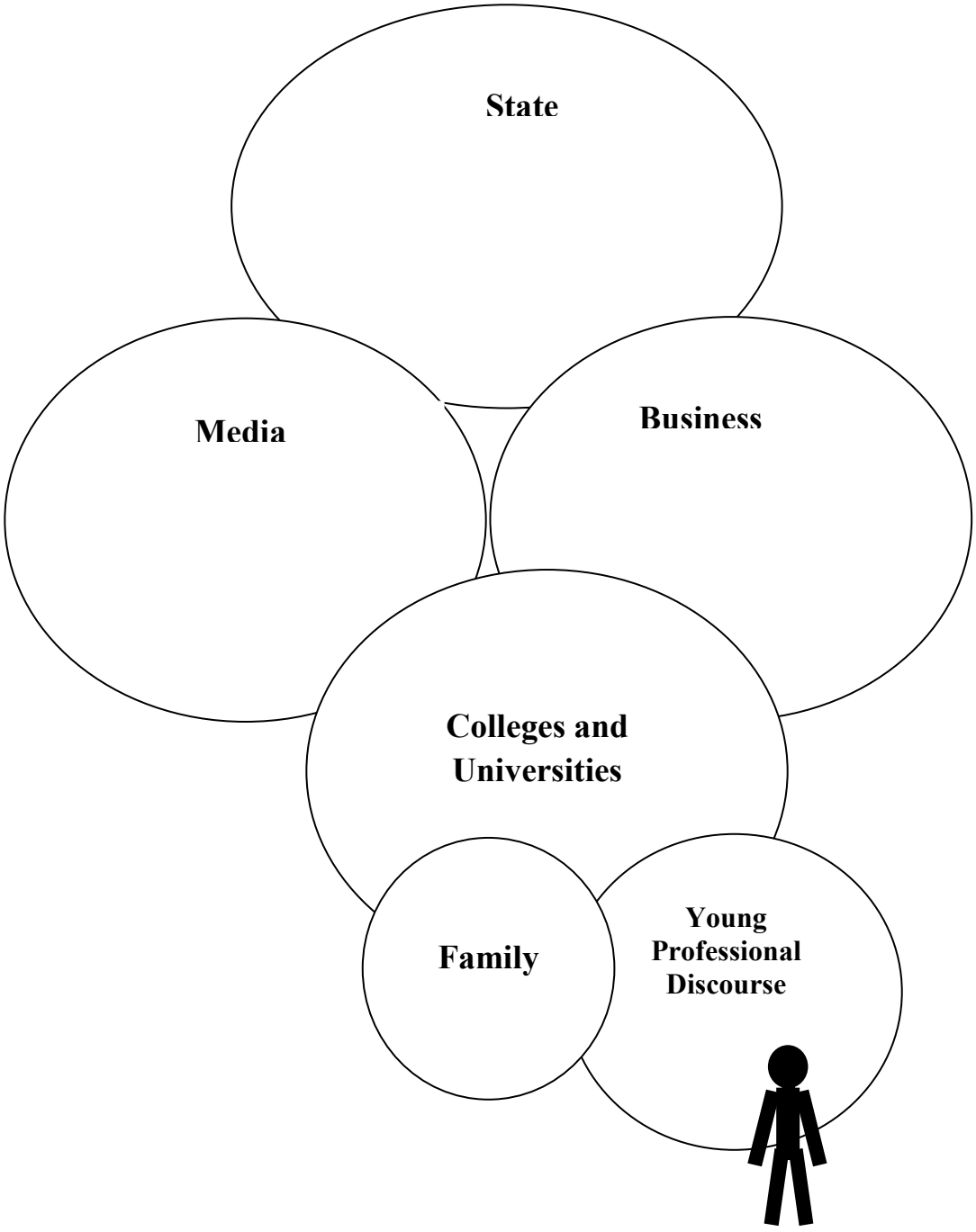
from new and potential young professionals who, at the time I interviewed them, had outsiders' perspectives on transitioning from college into work. While the leaders of the young professionals' networks, whose stories were told above, seemed to see being a young professional in the state as a personal choice, the group in the next section found themselves in frustrating situations that were not of their own making.

Becoming a Young Professional: Voices of First-Generation College Students

As institutional ethnography points the researcher towards starting from everyday lives, the next step in this study was to understand more about young students and workers in the region who perhaps did not fit as easily into the "young professional" category. A component of the state university system's mission is to educate first-generation college students (the first in their families to attend college or university). What experiences were first generation students having as they attended college and transitioned into the college-educated, professional class? In an intensely competitive economic environment, was attending college helping first-generation students catch up with others who were likely to have come from homes that already had economic advantage?

Three focus groups with five to ten participants each were conducted; as well ten individual interviews (see Appendix for full list and dates). All of the participants grew up in the state, and some had attended a branch of the state university, while others had gone out of state for some or all of their higher education and then later moved back. During the focus

Figure 5: Young Professionals: A Complex of Relations



groups and interviews stories were elicited about the processes of deciding where to go to school, applying, paying for college, deciding what to major in, what kind of career to go into, and where to live. I heard many stories of experiences and feelings from the first generation students and workers that reflected the understandings of how young professionals think, act and work expressed by state leaders and already successful young professionals. The first generation students and workers were independent, hard workers, passionate, and interested in finding work that would be lucrative and enjoyable. In many of the interviews, however, these desires and understandings of themselves seemed to conflict with the realities of their lived experiences.

The group of first generation students and workers all faced difficulties in getting into and through college – some of those difficulties were quite extreme. Interviewees had to pay for college themselves, and were accumulating huge amounts of debt even with financial aid. They were also worried about their future career prospects, as they saw that many of the graduates before them were not finding good jobs.

Julie, one of the interviewees whose story is recounted in this section, was a senior in college, after having made her way through college without a lot of financial or emotional support from her parents. She saw friends struggling to find work after graduation, and worried about her own future. Sam, another interviewee, grew up with her single dad who didn't have the skills to help her apply for financial aid. When she was a sophomore she was accepted into a state social work program that paid for her final two years of school in exchange for her commitment to work as a full-time social worker for the state for four years after graduation. Sam was thrilled with this, and now fully focused on developing her career and young professional persona. Steve was a young lawyer who moved back to the state after attending law school in a neighboring state. Finding his own path through college had been somewhat of a

challenge, particularly as he didn't have the family experience or connections that his peers had. He found that moving home offered him career opportunities that he wouldn't have had otherwise. Megan was a freshman in college when I interviewed her, making her way through college. While her mother was dying of cancer and father was unsupportive of her attending college, Megan applied to school because she didn't know what else to do – even though she had no idea what career she was intersted in and where she was headed in the future.

"They're not paying for my education. I am."

Julie was the first in her family to go to college, and she described to me the difficulty in navigating the complicated and expensive process of applying to schools. Each school charges an application fee, and Julie and her parents, in her words, didn't "know what they were doing" throughout the ordeal. She finally decided on a school in another small state several hours away, but found that being so far from her friends and family in a new, more urban environment challenging. When she was mugged during her first year, she quickly left and took some time off from college. Family and security attracted Julie back to her home. Known for having very little crime, the state consistently ranks among the "safest" states.

> My mom is supportive. Both of my parents are now, but at the beginning, my dad was like why are you going? You'll have to pay all this extra money. They look at it as they're successful without going to school, so why do I need to go to school? I was always a wildfire in my family. I had to do it. I told them they're not paying for my education. I am. They don't want me to go, that's fine. I wanted to go, so I did it all myself. I got all of my scholarships and stuff and my counselor worked really well. I think in my first semester of school, I only ended up paying $4,000 for it.

An indpendent “wildfire,” Julie made choices about whether and where to go to school against her father’s advice. After coming home from her first college, Julie began attending a school near her hometown. At the time of the interview she was close to graduating, but was again faced with the problem of what to do and where to go. She described how the current economic recession is impacting her and her peers. Many of them are faced with huge amounts of stress as they face finding work and paying off massive amounts of college debt.

> You can read any of the papers right now. A lot of students with debt are coming out of college. You go to college with the idea that it's going to better your life, that getting that degree is going to put you above somebody else, and it's not anymore. The people who've been in the workforce are staying in the workforce because they have that experience versus an education where you're just reading it from the book. They're going to continue to stick with those people because they have to train them less.
>
> A friend was telling me about how people who worked at Wal-Mart, there are four people there who graduated from [our college] within the past three years, and the only job they could find was at Wal-Mart. They were a broad section of degrees. One was an art history major. One was an English major. There was a management major in there and another person. They can't find jobs. They don't want to leave this area, and that's the issue, that they don't want to leave [the area], and so the only job they can find is working at Wal-Mart right now. It makes me really nervous to come out of college and know that I have $50,000 I'm going to have to be paying and it starts right away. If I can't find work, working at Wal-

Mart's probably not going to pay my bills. It makes me want to stay in school as long as I can. At the same time, it will cost me more money.

Julie achieved independence by deciding to go to college without her parents' full blessing. She spoke proudly of this, but was also a cause for concern as she faced the next set of decisions about what to do with her life. Wal-Mart, a nation-wide retail store that famously pays very low wages and offers little job security, has the image of lower class. Working at Wal-Mart does not require a college-degree, and was not a viable option for a budding young professional like Julie, particularly as she had a huge amount of debt. Building a career locally is proving to be difficult for Julie's peers. While they like the area and feel comfortable there, jobs such as working at Wal-Mart appear to be some of the only ones available – even to those with college degrees.

Along with the pressures of figuring out life, doing the work of college, determining how to pay for it, and what kind of career to work towards, Julie, like others, found her family relationships impacted by her decision to go to college. While living near home may have offered Julie some emotional and physical security, as she faced graduation Julie also had to contend with the realities of finding a job that would allow her to pay off her education debts. Julie's "wildfire" streak had led her to push against her father's skepticism about college and find her own path. Now, however, the promise that higher education would lead to a job better than one at Wal-Mart has been broken for her friends, leaving Julie concerned about her own future. Starting a more interesting career – something other than in retail – seems to be further away for Julie.

"This is a career and I don't want to be distracted."

Family dynamics and the separation between generations are also central in the words of Sam, a female college junior who grew up alone with her father. Her dad works at a minimum

wage job with no health insurance and Sam pays for all of her own personal expenses as well as for college. She must also navigate the bureaucratic processes of applying for school, financial aid, student loans, health insurance, and jobs. She discovered upon finishing her freshman year of college that she would need to transfer colleges to avoid the need to take out more than $20,000 per year in student loans for her remaining three years - a debt-level that would certainly burden her well into the future. Her long-term career plans are to become a social worker, although she knows it is not a particularly lucrative career. I asked her if she had ever considered another career and she jumped right to the difficulties she was having paying for the path that she felt committed to:

> I've always been told that you should do what you love, and the right job will come, so I've never really considered another career…I've done everything right, I was a really good student in school, I deserve to go to college. I should just be able to go, but I can't afford it.

Sam spoke about her "passion" for the career of social work. She, like other participants, understands that "a job" that does not provide continual growth in knowledge and personal development is not a career (Baker & Aldrich, 1996). College is expensive – impossible for many. Those who attend are typically looking for "careers," not simply employment. This distinction helps to shape their experiences, as they are willing to overcome huge obstables to obtain their college educations.

Discussions of independence and being "in control" were intertwined, throughout many conversations, with discussions of family relationships. Sam was the first in her family to go to college, and for her, the conflicts arising during the process of shaping a new career intersected with her relationship with her father and her changing social status. Sam lives with her single

father who was on welfare for several years after he hurt his back. He works for minimum wage now. Sam's father's inability to support her shapes her understanding of herself. In these three separate statements from Sam, we can see a bit of the ways in which the social relations of college education (and careers) are shaping her relationship with her father.

> My dad has no idea, he just gives me the [financial aid] forms. We have kind of a backwards relationship. He's worked like 2 or 3 jobs all his life, and that's what he has to do to get by.
>
> I feel like, if your parents didn't go to school, you end up paying for their mistakes. My dad didn't get to school, but why is that my problem? That was his choice. My choice is to go to school, but it's really hard.
>
> I think a lot of parents have a "don't ask don't tell policy" with their kids. It's just my personality though, I like to be in control.

Sam's father, like many of the other parents of my first generation informants, has had a series of "jobs," but not a career. As Sam attempts to shape a life that looks so different from her father's she has to determine what this means, not just as she shapes her future work life, but also where she is going to live and what kind of lifestyle she will have. All of this will look different from the choices of her father. A later interview with Sam reveals that she has secured a state social work job. At the time of the interview, she was still two years from college graduation, but the state would pay for a chunk of her remaining college education in return for a four-year work commitment. I asked Sam how her dad feels about this opportunity, and she explained that he's extremely proud and excited for her. She also added:

> But, I think he's nervous too, because most likely I'm not gonna end up in [my hometown] after. So, being his only kid, he's worried about the apartment finding,

like the first time living by myself, like really by myself. You know, I probably won't have roommates. Because I think most…well, I'll be 22 or 23, don't tend to live with roommates, but they're also still in school, or they're just kind of having a part-time job, not like something in their field. Like this is a career, and I don't want to be distracted…like, I'm gonna be working 8 to 5 plus, you know Monday through Friday, so I really want to be focused on that and not have roommates or deal with those kinds of issues. So, I think he's nervous about that too, you know. Single woman living by herself in an apartment, in some town I've never lived in before. Most likely [names several of the three largest cities in the state] those are the biggest offices…so I assume, that's mostly where I'll end up. So, he's really nervous about that.

Sam's words start to demonstrate the ways that developing a career is rooted in physical presence – not just in a job, but also in a particular community and lifestyle. For students who are first in their family to go to college, this means that shaping their careers entails a re-shaping of their family relationships.

"I had a competitive advantage in coming back."

Steve is a young lawyer working in the state near the town where he grew up. He attended undergraduate and law school in two nearby states and recently moved back. When we sat down for lunch one day near his office, he described to me the challenges of being the first in his family to attend college. The adjustment was difficult, and his parents were unable to help him make decisions about how to navigate the social waters of college life.

As an undergrad my parents always encouraged me to come home on the weekends, and it took me a while to realize that other students were staying on

> campus and getting to know each other and making valuable connections. Their parents were telling them to stay at school and make friends and connections while my parents had no idea about that. They thought they were being helpful by encouraging me to come home.

The differences between Steve and those who had family members with higher education experience were also apparent in law school.

> Once I did get to law school I had a lot of friends who had family who were lawyers, and they had a lot of knowledge about the field, how law school works.

Now that Steve has come back home he feels that he is on his own turf. In many ways, he can be more comfortable now than he was during his many years of higher education.

> Growing up here, I had a competitive advantage in coming back. When I was thinking about where to go, I just think that there's a competitive advantage to moving to a place that you know, and where people know you. I wanted to go back home because I thought that there was a lot of value in being in the place where I grew up.
>
> There are thousands of attorneys in [a large city]. When I took the bar exam there, there were several thousand taking it at the same time. When I took it in [this state], there were only 200 or so there. I think that starting your career in a place that's familiar to you is really valuable.

In these words about moving home, we can see how Steve turned his decision about where to live into an appropriate expression of being a young professional.

There is, however, more to being a young professional than having the right profession and job title. The ability to commit to a community and build a life – and lifestyle – is also crucial. When I asked Steve if he thought he would stay in the state, he wasn't sure.

> My wife and I were thinking of buying recently, but we decided to rent instead. My brother is a contractor in [a southern state], and just bought a really nice house with a pool and 4 bedrooms for less than $150K. The cost of living is pretty high here, compared to down south. The rental situation in [the town where I live] is really bad too. We looked about at about thirty apartments over the course of a few days, and there were some really, really terrible apartments out there.

The local region may not be able to offer Steve the ability to own, or even rent, a nice home for some time.

"I am still as confused as I was a year ago."

Megan spoke to me early in her college career, and her story expressed more resistance against the promises of higher education and young professional lifestyle than I heard from other participants. Megan was confused about why she was in college, and trying to sort out what she might be able to get out of the process. Her mother was terminally ill, and father was unwilling to help, so Megan is both paying for school herself and doing all the extra, hidden, work of college herself – from figuring out financial aid procedures to determining what classes to take.

> You know, from high school it's laid out for you. You have the workforce, which if you don't go to college, everybody is like 'what is wrong with you?' Or you have the military, and I'm not really a military type girl. I don't think so. Or you have college, and it just means okay, I'll go to college. I came here thinking everything will just—they say you don't have to figure it out now. You don't have

> to figure out what your major is. I put undecided on all of my applications, and you get here and it's only been a year and I still don't know what I want to do, and they say don't worry. You have plenty of time, but in reality, I only have three years left, and one year has gone by and I am still as confused as I was a year ago. I don't know how three years are going to make a big difference, especially if I only have two more gen eds [general education credits that all students must fulfill] to go.

Now that she's in school, Megan needs to figure out how to be a successful student who can get the most out of her education. In these words we can see that Megan finds that she had headed into college education through a process of elimination – she does not want to go into the blue-collar "workforce," nor is she a "military type girl." Therefore, she needs to go to college. This is particularly challenging for Megan, as her parents have not helped her with the process of applying, paying for, or attending college. We talked for a while about the schoolwork she was doing, the large amounts of homework and papers she had coming up. As we talked about stress, she spoke about more than school.

> Those are only the academic pressures. Also, a lot of students—I deal with financial aid completely on my own. I definitely have had to do a lot with that. Nobody else does this for you. Your housing deposit—it's not like your parents come from wherever they live and hand you your $300 and say okay honey, go pay this. You have to do stuff on your own. You have to have your act together, sometimes, which is sometimes difficult as a college student when you're trying to do 101 papers at once. The non-academic pressures are possibly more

challenging than the academic pressures, at least for me. It's not like my gen eds are really challenging. It's not like we have a bunch of exams.

Megan's mother was terminally ill at the time I interviewed her, exacerbating the emotional toll of attempting to get into and through college for Megan. Her mother's inability to work helped Megan to secure financial aid in the end. As she told me:

> We were having a really big problem with financial aid just with mom's health situation and everything, but no, it finally went through. I have a pretty good package. My parents were divorced when I was a junior in high school. And um, since then, it's just been difficult financially I guess for both of them. And I've lived with mom…and now that she has…it's breast cancer of the lungs and um she's in hospice care and everything, so she's not making any income whatsoever, so I definitely got a good financial aid package. So did my sister, she's a sophomore here. So, it's good, yeah, it's helping out a lot.

Trying to identify a college major has been traumatic for Megan – in other parts of the interview she described her desire to find a career that would allow her to stay interested in her work. She doesn't want to do the same thing everyday, she wants to do something that will allow her to give back to the community and feel good about her work. Finding this path through a process that is also draining all of her financial resources has been hugely taxing, and Megan began to question college. "I'm only here because I feel like I'm supposed to be here," she told me, as she explained that she was starting to question whether college was the place where you can go to try and find yourself.

Ultimately, Megan decided to apply for AmeriCorps for a year, and was accepted. This program will allow her to work for a year while earning money towards her tuition bill. She can

delay some of her major decisions about what to major in and what to do after graduation, while stopping the clock.

Professionalism and Young Professionalism

In his work *The Creative Class*, aimed at pointing regional leaders towards creative people as the key to increasing the competitive positions of their regions, Richard Florida (2002) encourages leaders to focus on attracting young people to their cities and states. He explained,

> …one group that has been neglected by most communities, at least until recently, is young people. Young workers have typically been thought of as transients who contribute little to a city's bottom line. But in the Creative Age, they matter for two reasons. First they are workhorses: They are able to work longer and harder, and are more prone to take risks, precisely because they are young and childless. In rapidly changing industries, it's often the recent graduates who have the most up-to-date skills. This is why so many leading companies from Microsoft to Goldman Sachs and McKinsey aggressively target them in their recruiting strategies. (Florida, 2002: 294-295)

As discussed in previous chapters, the university administrators who launched Generation Now were (knowingly or not) following Florida's directive and pushing for regional economic development by chasing the goal of retaining and attracting more young college graduates to stay in the state. Florida's quote informs us of some of the assumptions underlying the question the rationale for why regional leaders might *specifically* focus on attracting young workers over other demographic categories.

In the "Creative Age," as Florida calls it, being able to work "longer and harder" matters, but it is the type of work that individuals do, how fast they can do it, and how they ultimately

present themselves and their finished products that are truly valued. Within the modern narrative of what Florida calls "rapid change", creativity is now linked to images of "successful" business practices. In current popular usage creativity typically involves mixing and pulling together multiple ideas and images rather than coming up with something wholly new (Osborne, 2003). In his rant "against creativity" Osborne (2003) disagrees with Florida's claim that it is the "creative class" that revolutionizes regions. Osborne explained that creativity today is much more about image than about substantive new ideas, thus, it is the more "transient" young workers who (at least appear to) move fast among various circles and gain access to new ideas, places and people who can more easily embody the new corporate-minded creativity

Florida also casually informs us that young people are also more willing than older workers to take risks. Being "risky," is, however, fundamental to life in a privatized neoliberal economy. Martin (2002) explained in his work *The Financialization of Daily Life* that a major tenet of the new economy is the passing on of debt and risk from states and large organizations to individuals. This particularly impacts young workers as they are asked to take on more debt than previous generations to pay for their education. They are also asked to take personal responsibility for saving for their retirement, taking on the risk of investing that money themselves. Most of us accept this risk, however, because being "risky" is now part of our routines, and is a positive attribute to have in the new economy. As Martin explained, "to be risk averse is to have one's life managed by others, to be subject to their miscalculations, and therefore to be unaccountable to oneself" (Martin, 2002). Part of managing ourselves is to be able to manage risk.

When regional leaders, or consultants such as Richard Florida say that young people are creative, hardworking, risk takers they invoke the values of the neoliberal economy and global

economic development. The ideal young workers – the young professionals - embody the career and lifestyle expectations placed upon all of us by the new economic ruling regimes. It is important to consider, however, that they often *must* shape their lives toward those expectations. What seems from the outside like healthy risky behavior may actually be a response to a precarious financial situation.

In a sense, being a young professional can be seen as a hyper-version of having a career in the new economy. Our careers coordinate our actions and link us to external social organization practices. Today, the more flexible and willing to have a "dynamic" career you are, the more successful you will be (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). As Blatterer (2010) explained

> Today the tropes and ideology of youthfulness are not only understood as desirable in their embodied sense. Elan and verve, flexibility and mobility, risk-taking, improvising and experimenting propensities, creativity and thirst for change, situational living and present-centeredness, cutting-edge know-how, up-to-datedness, and beauty are case as desirable, if not imperative, from the standpoint of employers and corporations. (72)

Young professional careers are the perfect careers, as the discourse tells us that their youth, energy, and typical lack of families and mortgages, make young professionals the most flexible and transient. They are the group with the best chances of embodying the creativity, hard work and risk required by the new economic and social regimes.

Both "professional" and "young professional" were terms taken for granted throughout the efforts of Generation Now, and, as I observed, were used both informally, to refer to anyone who fit into the demographic groups of professional or young professionals, and also more formally, to refer to someone who belonged to a professional or young professional organization.

Professionalism, I found in my observations, is a complicated, ambiguous concept. As Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) explained, "to invoke the professional is to put into conversational play a set of unacknowledged cultural assumptions" (147). I examine some of those assumptions here, beginning with an example from the field. One of the founders of a local young professionals' network told this story to a group of college students.

> We have all types of people in the [young professionals' network]. I remember we had a woman come in jeans and a baseball cap, and she seemed almost angry. "I'm here, but I don't really belong here," she said. "Why not?" I asked. "I'm not a professional," she said. "Well, what do you do for a job?" I asked. "I rescue puppies." "Your job is rescuing puppies, so you're a professional puppy rescuer," I said, and then I introduced her to a bunch of people, and I saw her at events for the next couple of years.

In this story regarding the inclusiveness of a young professionals' network, it is possible to see how difficult it is for many people to see themselves as "professionals." The puppy rescuer is young, and works for a living, but does not feel she is a "professional." The term refers to more than just the material aspects of being paid for what you do; it also has symbolic capital. Professionalism evokes "evidence of status and identity, powerful images of actors and with attendant evaluations of bodies and behaviors, and exclusive networks of relationships" (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007: 153). Being a professional is a discursive practice (Grey, 1998) that is much more complicated than calling someone a "professional puppy rescuer" and having it be so. It is true, however, that both the material and symbolic connotations (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007) of being a professional have evolved and broadened over time.

While the term "professional" was originally used only to refer to those working in "pure" professions with clearly codifiable expert knowledge such as law and medicine, postindustrial society has pushed other occupations to emulate those "classic" professions. It can seem as if everyone is now "professionalizing" (Wilensky, 1964). Scholarly discussions of professionals (e.g. Hodgson, 2005: Noordegraaf, 2007) recognize that currently being "professional" does not demand comprehension of a particular body of knowledge but is more about image and performance. As knowledge workers "professionalize," these attempts have been recognized as ways to link people and organizations that must now be "flexible." Professionalizing is also a way of continuing to build and establish legitimacy (Noordegraaf, 2007).

Several decades ago "young professional" emerged as a casual point of reference for those in their twenties and early thirties who are college-educated and on a career track. A closely related term, "yuppie" (young urban professional), was popularized in the 1980s and referred to someone projecting a preppy, upwardly-mobile, urban image. "Young professional" has become more ubiquitous in recent years, and the term and group of people it refers to have a more "official" location in the corporate and regional development worlds. Young professional networks, for example, have become more popular United States. Typically established by local chambers of commerce and sponsored by local businesses, these organizations are used as a recruiting and retention tool for corporations who can offer new workers a social structure, and have become a means of solidifying and legitimizing the roles of young workers in a region. Being a young professional is about, to some degree, a particular type of education, and engaging with certain content, but it is even more about image and being accountable to the idea of being a "young professional" in the eyes of state and corporate leaders.

The Ruling Relations of Young Professionalism

DeVault (2008) describes the "paradoxical discourses" of the new economy. There is, she explained, "both an individualizing rhetoric and one that erases and homogenizes individuals." (DeVault, 2008: 16). The discourse that "homogenizes" people puts them into categories, erasing their differences, while the "individualizing rhetoric" encourages people to focus inward, continually turning their attentions and their work onto themselves. In the stories from the young professionals presented above, we can hear the voices of three people that demonstrate the paradox of the new economy. They are passionate about both their careers and where they live, and are able to link these two spheres together in their words and actions into cohesive narratives that present their own career work as being good for state, and good paths for other young people to emulate. The category of young professional helps to create a homogenizing group, but it is crucial for each person in that group to be dedicated to themselves and their careers.

The actions of the young professionals show how both the "homogenizing" and "individualizing" effects of our current understandings of "young professionals" coordinate individual actions. By following a socially acceptable path through college, financial success and community building one can fit in and achieve young professional status, but that is not enough – having a focus on personal development, a unique career and interesting lifestyle are also important. Gary, for example, spoke about his desire to achieve a certain financial status and buy a home, just like many other recent graduates, but found that the best way to do so was by doing something different from his law school peers who were moving to major metropolitan areas. Gary could make an impact in a place that was distinct.

Being a professional worker in today's economic climate is about work status and position, but even more so about self-discipline – both in and out of work. Those dedicated to the

notion of their career development, the elite workers who have become "entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make" (Rose, 1990), are particularly skilled at this. Their self-discipline extends outside the workplace, as they are typically working on self-improvement strategies across multiple spectrums of life (Garsten & Grey, 1997). The young professional networks offer many opportunities for self-development through the trainings they offer.

Illustrating this, Christine told a group of human resources professionals about some of the "better livings" training classes offered by the network:

> These events offer information such as how to order wine when you're at a restaurant, how to order scotch, how to start an art collection. When you're out at a business dinner with the guy with the gold cufflinks and he invites you to have a scotch, you better know how to order it. When I was in college we had a little course on business dining, where we learned how to eat professionally. This is really important stuff to know. Our goal is to empower young professionals. When you're just coming out of college you don't know how to do these things, and these types of events can be stressful. This series teaches you how to deal with those situations.

The "empowerment" to be a young professional involves, not just work within the workplace, but also status outside of work. In the case of budding young professionals, knowledge, presumably, can help lead to status. Being trained to understand and appreciate the trappings of the middle/upper-middle class, such as art and wine, is part of that status attainment. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, taste is not innate, but socially determined, and a "social weapon" that is used to classify individuals. It is important to note that it is often not the categories of

consumption that classify individuals, but knowing how to consume them in a particular manner (e.g. the correct way to drink wine) that gives a person real cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Generation Now, for a time, used as a slogan "keeping the best and the brightest in [the state]." Efforts to set the young professionals apart from others in the state could be seen often in the work done by Generation Now leaders, and also in the words and actions of the young professionals whose stories I gathered. As Christine stated, "Although there are fewer young people in [the state], there are a collection of people here with degrees who are very interested in their careers. These are people who are also committed to their communities." Christine also told the group she was speaking to that:

> We are also thinking about developing some sort of professional designation for being a member and going to the events that we offer. I could be "Christine Smith, MBA, YP," [displaying the young professional title alongside the title that comes with achieving a Masters in Business Administration] for example. We're working with corporate partnerships on some of these ideas.

The leaders of the young professional groups were attempting to present themselves as part of a somewhat exclusive group, and working to further legitimize their status in the community. Groups that define themselves as "elite" are common in new economy organizing (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). Alvesson & Robertson (2006) found that elite identities can "provide some sort of existential security in an occupation characterized by ambiguity and questioning" (220). They also found that elitism can act to increase commitment to an organization or career, and ultimately act as a form of control. In this case, the boundaries of that control are related, not just to individual work organizations, but also to city and state.

As Christine mentioned, the young professionals are not just interested in their own careers, but also "committed to their communities. They're looking for something to invest in." As Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) explained:

> The structuring and behavior of a class of professionals are related not only to their identities as individuals but also to recognition by the state and their access to various avenues of influence in society. In this way, legitimate expertise often implicates privilege, which in turn means public responsibility. The idea of professionalism both exalts and regulates the moral performance of individuals who identify with a certain class of practitioners." (151)

Young professionals increased their legitimacy by acting accountable to their communities and regions, adding to social and economic development initiatives. A young professional career is perhaps only possible in certain kinds of places. It is well-documented that different kinds of careers are possible or most conducive to certain industries and certain places, and some careers are more "boundaryless," or more facilitative of moving from organization to organization, than others. For example, the creative industries rely heavily on freelance and contract work (e.g. Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005; Haunschild, 2003), while other careers - such as those in public sectors - typically have more bureaucratic structures (Koskina, 2008). It is also well documented that particular career structures become associated over time with particular regional areas. This happens through economic development practices (Molotch, Freudenburg, Paulsen, 2000), localized knowledge movement and exchange (Saxenian, 1996), as well as institutional structures such as education (Delmestri & Walgenbach, 2005). Opportunities to access "new" career structures have been found to be limited in some regions (e.g. France, see Dany, 2003, Greece, see Koskina, 2008, and Iceland, see Sturges, Conway & Liefooghe, 2008), while the

Silicon Valley in the United States supports many high-technology organizations that rely on flexible, mobile workforces and has therefore become "the locus of the paradigmatic case of the modern, boundaryless career" (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000: 31).

Because places are associated with particular economic categories and career forms, the "same" job or career becomes very different when seen through the lens of place. Consider the difference between being a software engineer in Silicon Valley to being one in Omaha, Nebraska, or the difference between working in finance in Manhattan to working in finance in a small town in Vermont. These differences can be felt on a discursive level, as they connote different meanings and status, as well as on a material level. The financial rewards will likely vary, as will the possibilities for shaping one's daily patterns of social and work interactions. Mitchell, Bunting and Piccioni (2004), for example, found that many Canadian artists were moving from urban to rural areas, and when they did so their work and life patterns shifted. Their art changed with the new landscapes they were confronted with for inspiration, they had a new customer base, and their daily work and life patterns shifted. Their identities as artists were deeply impacted by their new region. Another study, analyzing the discursive production of masculinity among professionals in the high-tech industry, found that the work culture in Silicon Valley has fostered a masculine identity based on brilliance, technical skills, long work hours, and, for many, at the same time, a desire to be present as husbands and fathers (Cooper, 2000). In Cooper's research it is possible to see that both work and personal identities were created in part through the career paths offered within the structures and culture of a particular place.

The idea that place differentiation matches self differentiation is recognized and perpetuated by actors concerned with regional economic development. They recognize the role that place plays in making or remaking lives, and are responding to and shaping the discourses of

where to live by actively marketing their places as being associated with particular careers and particular subjective forms. Regional groups, for example, have developed marketing campaigns, as well as much more substantial geographic planning efforts in many parts of the world, and have worked with Richard Florida and other consultants to create places that are attractive to "young professionals." While these localized development projects claim heterogeneity based on local concerns and unique competitive advantages, closer inspection reveals the uniformity of these phenomena (e.g. Leitner, 1990; Zimmerman, 2008). Retaining some aspects of the region's unique culture was also part of development plans of state leaders. I heard many leaders repeat the sentiment expressed by Gary when he was talking to college students:

> [Our state] is an independent state and I like that about living here. We have that whole live free or die, cantankerous Yankee image, and we shouldn't lose that. I want to think that being an independent person is a cool attribute. I'm choosing something that's different or unique, I'm not going with the crowd by living here.

We choose both our careers and place to live, and often in conjunction with one another, and those actions should be seen in the context of current economic development practices. Our relationships to where we live are now shaped through models of choice and consumption rather than citizenship. Now we have to make the right choices – in where we live and work, and what and how we consume in order to achieve elite status. The opportunities to make those choices however, and the tools to make them well, are not available to everyone.

Young professional status is more accessible with the existence of groups like young professionals' networks that make an effort to be inclusive, but it is still true that achieving cultural capital through self-discipline and purposeful, authentic networking leaves some people out. Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson (2006) explained that

> Networks as social structures generate forms of actors and particular opportunities for action at individual and organizational levels. And this inevitably implies and potentially creates another kind of personhood: the marginal, the outsider, and the isolate. Such people will lack a crucial dimension of professional identity. (252)

More and better education for all is seen as the path for individuals to rise above lower class status. Education, as common sense currently dictates, will allow individuals and regions to compete in the global economy. A more highly educated labour force and citizenry is the means "to solve national economic and individual social and employment problems" (Lehrmann, 2009: 632). We expect that everyone's life chances will improve the more education they have, but Brown and Hesketh (2004) find that "attending higher education may not improve the employability of large numbers of students because most universities are limited in their capacity to cultivate the personal and cultural capital required for fast-track appointments" (103). The difficulties that come from not finding gainful employment are compounded with large amounts of student debt. There is increasing evidence that the higher education system reinforces rather than challenges the status quo (Aries & Seider, 2005; Brown & Hesketh, 2004). While studies show that this is a systematic problem, the young professional discourse puts the blame for problems and credit for success solely on individuals.

A Problem of Perception?

Figure 4 continues to build on the map of the social relations of Generation Now and young professionalism. The analyses of the everyday lives of young students and workers have shown how they are coordinated by the external discursive practices of regional economic development and the realities of socioeconomic class. The interviews with first generation students and workers further demonstrated that family wealth and status are crucial factors for

one's ability to attend college and ability to start a career. Financial aid is an central component in many students' experiences throughout their college educations.

The local young professionals, as represented by the leaders of these networks are a dynamic, career-oriented group. The young professionals I profiled at the beginning of this chapter have the "ideal" careers and lifestyles, but all had attended college or university outside of the state. One had even worked for a number of years in a major city before coming back to the state and starting her own business. Another had a very privileged background, attending the most elite high school in the state, and then going to university at two of the best schools in the United States.

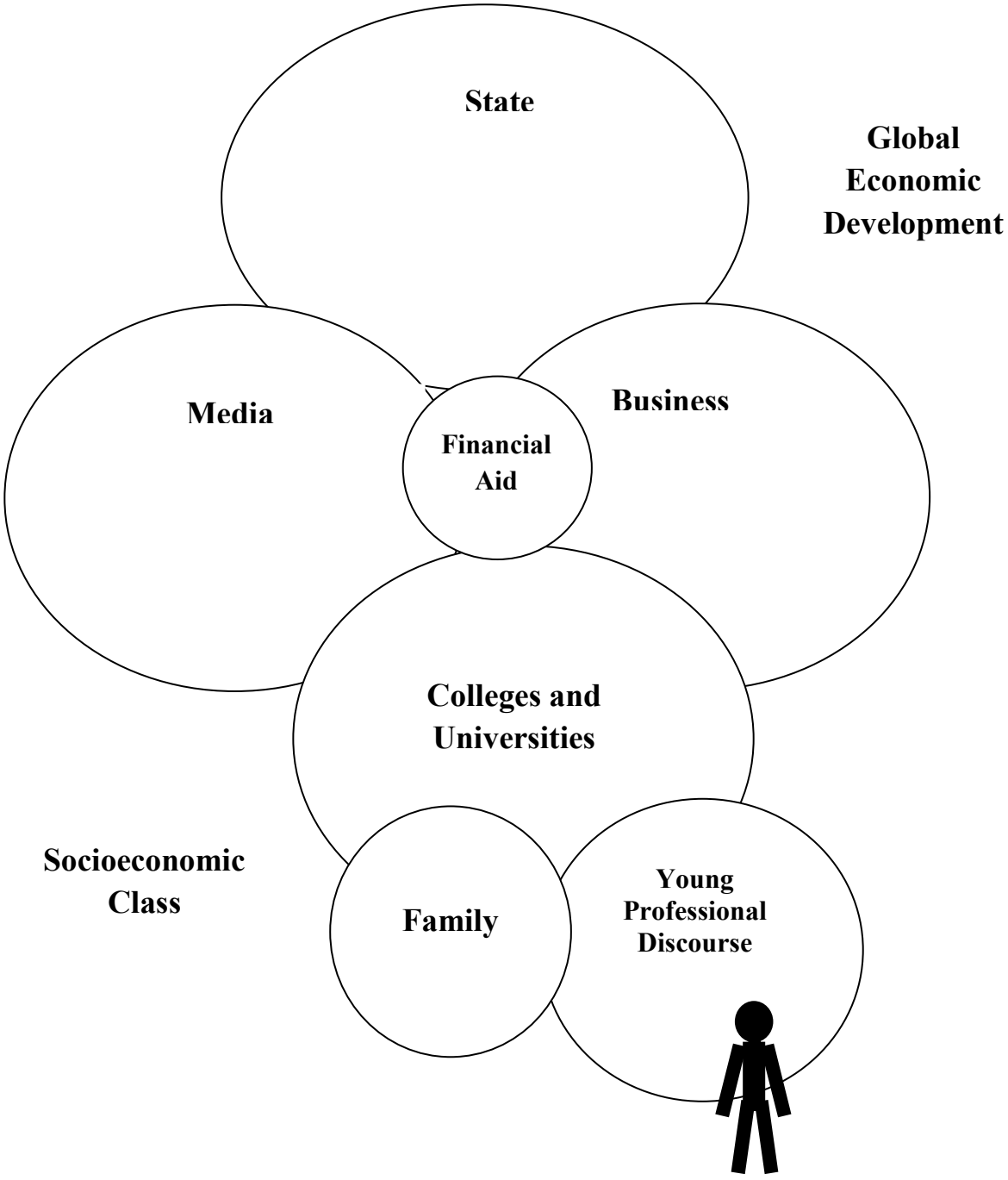
While the stories of already successful young professionals fit into the marketing campaign being created by university leaders, the experiences of the students and workers who were the first in their families to attend college exposed how much effort it can take to become a young professional. While the interviewees often referred to their lives in ways that fit the discourse of young professionalism, they were also faced with family struggles, huge amounts of debt, and a lack of jobs or housing that conflicted with the images of independence, passion, flexbility and financial success tied to young professionals. Their experiences were at odds with the discourse of young professionalism that, as I have shown in this chapter, is tied to the ruling relations of economic development, not everyday experiences.

The very real struggles of the interviewees whose stories I have presented in this chapter were covered up by Generation Now marketing messages. They instead were focused on creating images of enterprising young people with exciting, hip lifestyles. The complicated family relationships and efforts of college students are hidden in the "official" discourse of being professional, learned by young people through their socialization from parents and schools, as

well as language and images used in the media. Although the college students I spoke to whose words I present here may not have used the term "young professional," they were clearly knowlegeable of its implications and already practitioners of it through their education and career actions. This idea organizes the lives of young people under capitalist arrangements by incorporating them into current socioeconomic relations. For students and workers it is an important component of the social relations of capitalism they must engage with. There are consequences to this. The systematic frustrations and contradictions are hidden from sight or regarded as individualized problems rather than features of the contemporary social organization.

In this chapter it is demonstrated that the problems young people face in the state are not simply problems of perception that can be adequately addressed with a marketing campaign. In the next chapter, I present data from further efforts of university administrators to gather support for Generation Now and develop a marketing plan. During an early phase of Generation Now, university and college marketing students were enlisted to formulate ideas to attract their peers to the state. The enterprising relationships among university employees and students were exposed during this project, as were the socioeconomic class differences among the students involved.

Figure 6: Young Professionals: A Complex of Relations



CHAPTER 6

LEARNING "MARKETING," SEEING CLASS:

STUDENTS AS MARKETING FIRMS

Introduction

Chapter 6 turns to Generation Now and its efforts to tackle regional growth and competition. University administrators enlisted professors from different universities around the state to use Generation Now as a real-life case study. The administrators expected that students from state colleges and universities would be able to provide insight into the kinds of marketing efforts that would attract themselves and peers to live and work in the state. Three marketing classes at three different institutions used Generation Now as a case study: one class from the state university's highly-regarded business school, and two from smaller state colleges. I successfully negotiated access to two of the classes - the state university business school's class, and one smaller state college class - and followed each throughout the semester.

The Generation Now administrators asked the students in each class to evaluate the survey research that had already been finished, conduct their own marketing research, and present a final marketing plan to university administrators and other leaders in the state. The students would, university administrators hoped, provide insight into how to attract and retain their generation – the necessary workers to expand and strengthen the state's economy. The white paper published on the state university system's website described the reason for involving the students.

> Provosts at [the state university and two small state colleges] agreed to work with their marketing faculty to have a class focus on developing ideas for and

components of the proposed "tourism-like marketing campaign." Faculty were selected and courses will begin in January…Having students develop ideas was a natural next step since they represent the exact demographic the effort will target. Most of the students will be seniors and they will make this effort the primary focus of their coursework in the spring semester of 2008. (White paper, 2008)

While the administrator who wrote the white paper described the purpose of involving the students as developing ideas, I come to a different conclusion. I show in this chapter how the students' involvement in Generation Now was simply to connect the image of the university directly to potentially successful graduates who were planning to stay in the state. Unfortunately, during the course of the semester legitimate concerns of the students regarding living and working in the state had to be put aside. Furthermore, differences between the state university and small state colleges were revealed. While state and business leaders seemed to view the distinctions as individual differences, my observations and analyses show them to be arising more systemically from quality of education.

Early in the project, the administrator travelled to each of the schools and spoke to the classes of marketing students to explain the project. The following words are from his explanation of Generation Now to one of the classes.

> The survey showed that of those who planned on leaving, fifty-two percent said that they would be interested in coming back in the future. Those are the types of people that [the state] businesses need to fill their jobs. So three hundred and twenty-three people who were going to leave need to be encouraged to stay. This would have an economic impact of three hundred twenty-seven million dollars over five years. These are people that you are eating with, sleeping in the dorms

> with, hanging out with. This is not the type of marketing where you need to do radio or television. You are already with these people, so you can do something creative. (Fieldnotes, Jan. 2008)

The administrator asked the students to use their own lives and everyday college experiences as they developed their marketing plans; he saw that their lives as students made them experts on the consumers they were expected to attract. They were essentially asked to market to themselves. While none of the students from any of the three marketing classes said that they had taken the survey that had been distributed earlier that academic year, university administrators drew them into the initiative as enterprising students, marketing professionals, and, ultimately, as potential consumers of career and lifestyle in the state.

The university administrators working on Generation Now had the students in each class read through the data already collected, gather more data from their peers, and put together marketing plans for the initiative. They gave the students access to information about what the state has to offer young professionals through a tour of the urban center of the state where there has been a revitalization effort over the past several decades. Students were introduced to young professionals from around the state who told stories about what it was like to live and work in the region as young college graduates. Finally, the administrators asked students to present their final marketing plans to state business and government leaders at the end of the semester.

Involving students in Generation Now helped university leaders to legitimize the university's place in the state's economy. State leaders, like leaders of regions around the globe, perceived that the state needed a strong, growing economy that could retain local businesses and attract new ones to effectively compete in the global economy. To accomplish this, the state needed a skilled, employable workforce, provided largely by the state's colleges and universities.

The stated purpose of involving students in Generation Now was to gain insight into how university leaders could best market the state to young people. The students' input ended up being quite limited, however, as I will discuss in this chapter. In fact, there was another, unstated, reason for student participation. The collaboration of Generation Now leaders with students enhanced the public image of the initiative. The students' involvement in the project was announced in a press release and the white paper published online. Reporters were invited to tour the urban center with the students and attend their presentations, which resulted in a radio segment and several newspaper articles. Journalists and a television crew were also invited to the event where students presented their final projects. Administrators used images of the students and their marketing plans to demonstrate both the success of Generation Now, and the success of the university system in supplying the state with employable young graduates.

This chapter focuses on the creation of marketing texts. Traditionally, knowledge that that has a textualized format is seen as more "legitimate" than knowledge gained from experience (Smith, 1987; 2005), which means that those who are more skilled at reading, interacting with, and creating "official" texts will have an advantage. As I discuss in this chapter, the class from the university had a very strict marketing process laid out for them by their professor, and created very professional marketing images and documents, while the class I observed at a smaller college did not receive clear directions from their professor and thus were not able to create polished final products. The repercussions of the distinctions between the pedagogies became very apparent during the public presentation at the end of the semester. Business leaders, state representatives and the media were invited to witness the student's final marketing ideas and engage in a discussion with the students. The group of students from the state university business school gave an extremely polished and professional presentation, while

the other two groups did not. Ultimately, the university students were seen as more competent, intelligent, and focused on their careers than the students from the small college.

Mainstream psychology-based understandings of career invite us to see these differences as a difference in motivation, passion, and personal drive, and indeed, that is how the university administrators defined the distinctions between the two groups. I, however, saw the event as a display of socioeconomic class differences. I found during my time observing the marketing students that some students were getting the tools to become the young professionals that state leaders were looking for, while others were not. In a career environment where individual workers are seen as almost entirely in charge of their own destinies this is extremely problematic. Everyone, in the current mainstream view, has the ability to take the initiative and to learn the tools for success. Those who do not have the tools are seen as personally incompetent - their potential lack of access to education and resources is not considered (Grey, 1994; Fournier, 1998). Regional and university leaders with this understanding of how career success happens will direct resources towards marketing efforts like Generation Now, rather than towards social structures that will lead to equity in access to education and jobs.

In the next two sections I describe what I saw in the two very distinct marketing classes I followed, and then I describe the theater presentation that was the culmination of the semester. Throughout these descriptions, I focus on the social organization of the textual process of marketing as it shapes what is legitimate knowledge. I put the work with the students in the context of the need to create an "employable" workforce for regional economic development. At the end of the chapter I discuss the final outcomes of this marketing work and how university administrators ended up using the class work of the students.

Marketing Students in the Business School

The university business school is in a brick building on the beautiful sprawling state university campus located in a small college town near the coast. One student told me later, "I got into some more elite schools, but came here because it looked like the ideal college campus. It looks like what a university is supposed to be" (Fieldnotes, Apr. 2008). The business school is in an older building, but the classrooms seem to have been recently renovated, with new carpeting and long tables, new comfortable swivel chairs for the students, and new technology for electronic presentations.

The marketing class was divided by the professor into six groups of eight students each, and each group was assigned a client for the semester. Examples of potential clients included a local soft drink corporation, a local restaurant, and the university alumni office. And, of course, one group was assigned Generation Now as their "client" for the semester. When I first visited the class, all the clients were there as well, and everyone in the room, including the students, was dressed professionally. It was clear the students had been directed by the professor to dress up for the occasion.

When I visited the class the second time none of the other clients were there, I was there now, not as a "client," but as a participant observer. At that time, I learned that all six groups had to follow a very specific format in developing their marketing campaign, which they were given during their first week of class. The students had to follow a very specific format in developing their marketing campaign, which they were given during their first week of class. This format primarily followed basic marketing conventions that were outlined in their textbook, and the professor provided the students with explanations of the model that included examples from his

several decades of work in marketing as a practitioner and from his eight years of teaching marketing during which time he used basically the same structure every semester.

The strict plan that the class was following was continually reinforced by the professor and the students. At the beginning of each class he would show them a timeline of the semester, showing them exactly how much work they should have done to date. At one class I attended the students were preparing their midterm report for their clients (the university administrators). One student asked exactly what they would need to have together for the upcoming midterm report. The professor responded, writing a list of four things on the board as he talked.

> There are only four things you need to do. [He began writing on the white board.] Number one, you need your statement of work. What is this project about? Number two, your research. [The professor began to talk as if he were the students giving the presentations to their clients.] "Here is what we did, here are the results, you can show it in chart form, or some quotations, or whatever. This is what we learned from the research: X students think this; X people have this false impression, etc. etc." Number three, your marketing strategy. "Here is what we plan to do. We want to…bullet point...bullet point…slide…slide… [The professor mimicked the motions of going through a PowerPoint presentation]. You don't have…bullet… bullet… so, click, we want to run an event like X"…whatever it is, you're going to lay out various strategies.
>
> You're going to show how you're going to move people from this perception to that perception. This is basic marketing, Marketing 101 people. Number four is your budget. How much is it all going to cost. Some of you have already come to me saying that you want to do this event or that event but you don't know how

much it's going to cost. Well, I do. I have spreadsheets that lay it out, so I know how much it's going to cost.

By the way, this is really how it works in private industry. They also do these midterm results, so that even if you've been meeting all along you put a stake in the ground and make sure everyone is on the same page. I'll post some samples, I'll help. We're in this together, right? (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2008)

This professor often stated his constant support of the students' work, and the four bullet points he listed gave the students very clear instructions, including a framework for some of the sentences that should be included in their report. The students were learning how to be marketing professionals by documenting exactly how they did each step of the work. Being able to follow the format and articulate what they did for each stage of was crucial.

The students quickly got used to writing details of everything they did for their weekly reports to their professor. My fieldnotes describe one of the students pausing during a conversation where they were developing focus group questions to record their task.

"Wait - let me go back and put this in the report," said Serena, "developed focus group questions," she spoke as she wrote in her laptop. As they did anything, she was adding it to the list of things that had been done that week, which would be reported back to the professor the next day. (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2008)

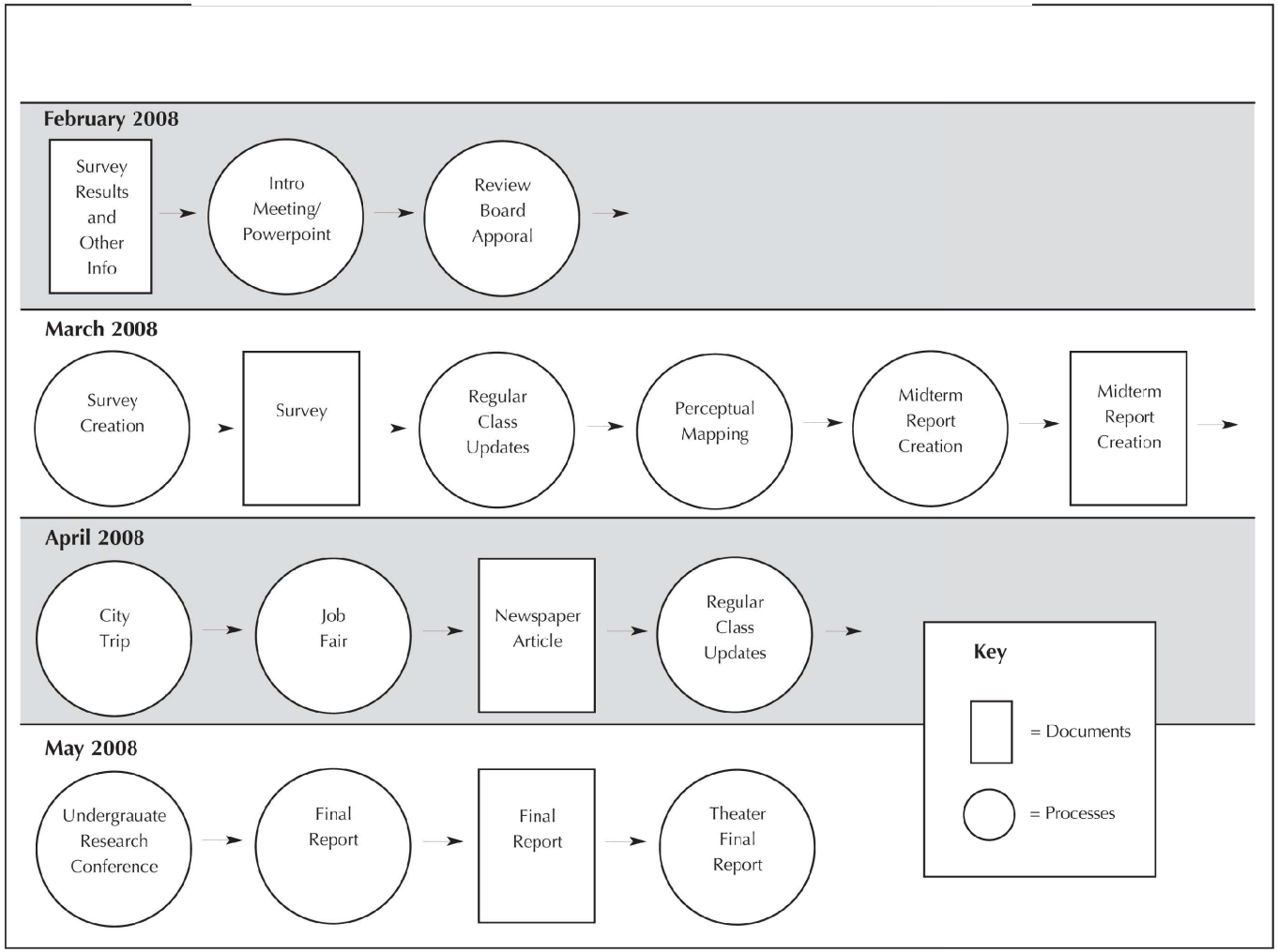
Figure 7 shows the students' activities throughout the semester, with circles representing the activities of the students, and rectangles representing the documents they created. After their midterm report, the students did more research and expanded their marketing plan. Generation Now leaders organized a tour of the state's urban center for the students from the participating marketing classes around the state. The university students also planned and hosted a small job

fair attended by ten employers and several hundred university students. They sent out a press release about the job fair to the media, and a newspaper article was written about it. When they finished their final report on Generation Now, they presented it at a research conference on campus, a second time just to their classmates, and then finally at the theater at an event organized by Generation Now leaders.

I attended the students' events, and spent some time with the parents of two of the university students who attended the job fair and final report. Both sets of parents were professionally dressed and clearly very proud of their children. Along with the support of their professor and parents, the students also cared about each other. During one conversation I witnessed, the students were talking about how they felt closer to the people in their group than other friends on campus. Within this group I found a social environment where a successful image was clearly very important. Below are excerpts of conversations I listened to while they were waiting for their final report to begin.

> Garth said he had just been at an interview in Philadelphia, and had stayed at a 'fancy hotel where he got all kinds of fancy stuff.' 'Look,' he said, pulling out a blue mitten. 'Is that a swim cap? asked Serena. 'No, no, it's for shining your shoes,' Garth said, pulling the mitten over his hand and buffing his already shiny brown leather shoes. (Fieldnotes, May 2008)
>
> Mel and Albert [both males] asked Laura [a female] about her clothes, and she told them how much all her jewelry cost. "$250 for the necklace, $150 for the watch." Mel and Albert told Laura she spent too much on clothes and jewelry, but she said she 'needs it for work.' (Fieldnotes, Apr. 2008)

Figure 7: Large University Marketing Class Timeline



> Garth said he had just been at an interview in Philadelphia, and had stayed at a
>
> Serena asked the group if they liked her suit, 'since I've worn it to every event we've done.' Serena had on a shiny green tank top. 'I like that top,' said Laura, 'but if you don't have a button-down top to go with your suit, I'm going to buy you one.' Serena. said 'I have one, but it gaps and shows my bra'. 'You have to use this double-sided tape,' said Laura. (Fieldnotes, May 2008)

These students, still in college, already owned formal business attire, and understood the complexities of "dressing for success." Most of them had already had internships in corporate environments, which improved their knowledge of professional dress and etiquette.

The students' knowledge of "professionalism" was evident during a visit from a reporter representing a major metropolitan newspaper. Each of the eight groups from the university marketing class presented their final reports to the organizations they worked for at the end of the spring semester. The Generation Now group went last, presenting to their professor, peers, and the university administrators from the initiative. They packed up and said goodbye after their presentation was over. Serena and Laura pulled flip flops out of their bags, and slipped off their high heels into the more comfortable sandals. Serena pulled her hair back into a ponytail and the two women put their bags over their shoulders.

At that moment, a reporter from a metropolitan-area (in a bordering state) newspaper who had been invited by the university administrators came into the room looking confused . One of the administrators realized who she was, and introduced himself, and asked Serena and Laura if they could stay and talk to the reporter. The professor was still there as well. It had taken the

reporter and photographer longer to drive from the city in the bordering state than they had expected, so they arrived late.

Laura asked if she should call Garth and Albert, other students from their group, to see if they could come back. She called them quickly from her cell phone and said that they were on their way. Serena and Laura switched back their high heels and Serena restyled her hair while the administrator talked to the reporter. When Garth and Albert came back they put their jackets and ties back on that they had taken off on their way out of the room. They held up the t-shirt they had designed with the logo of the initiative on it, and stood their smiling while the photographer took their picture. A brief article about Generation Now, with the picture of the students, appeared on the newspaper's website a week later.

The picture on the newspaper's website showed budding "young professionals" – students just days away from graduation, ready to work in a professional, corporate environment. The photo also demonstrates their commitment to the state (their community) by showing them smiling and holding up the t-shirt with the logo they designed. The picture doesn't show the changes of footwear and clothing the students had ready, nor does it show that they woke up in dorm rooms that morning, were doing the project for a grade, and were stressed about final exams. Nor does it show the beer they will drink that night at the bar and the marijuana they'll smoke later. All of these bits and pieces of their everyday lives are lost – the reproducible version of them in the media text shows them simply as young professionals in suits ready to enter the corporate world.

In the following section, I will describe what I saw in the small state college marketing class I was able to observe. The professor in that class I observed offered much less structure and support, and the students had less knowledge about how to project professional images.

"Total Chaos" at a Small State College

The small state college where I observed marketing students was geographically located only an hour's drive away from the large state university, but the demographics of the two educational institutions looked quite different. The large university is much more expensive to attend, pays its professors much more, and has a much larger endowment. While the small college also has a picturesque campus, the business classes take place in a small, old building that clearly had not been renovated in decades. The desks and chairs in the classroom were old, and a cart with a projector on it had to be brought into the classroom for PowerPoint presentations. The resources of the university and its students and their families appeared to be much greater than the resources of the small college, which, as I explain in this chapter, supports the notion the marketing class at the small college was less effective than the class I observed at the university.

The marketing students at the small college were given the same introduction to the project from the university administrator as the students in the university business school. The process they were given by their professor for completing a marketing plan and presenting it to the community was, however, distinct. The professor for the small college marketing class had been teaching at the small college for over a decade, but this semester was developing a completely new course syllabus for the semester because of the Generation Now project. She did not have a clear, tested structure in place for the class. During a class period that I observed, the large group was having a discussion about how to distribute the surveys and analyze the data. The students seemed confused, and the professor changed her mind several times about how the survey should be distributed. During this discussion, the professor and students turned to me for guidance on several points. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

> ‘OK, now we have to talk about what we’re going to do when we get the surveys back,’ said the professor. ‘What do we do? Maybe we should take advantage of Emily being here. Emily?’ Everyone in the class looked at me. At this point, my heart sank. I am not a statistics expert, and her pulling me into the work was unexpected. (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2008)

The university professor had a structure to offer his students for completing their marketing plan. In the small college class, the plan was constructed organically using whatever resources they had at hand – such as the PhD student (myself) who was visiting their class. During that same class period, the professor explained to me some of the work they were planning to do in her class.

> “We’ve also assigned each student to take a state and look at what they’re doing to try to retain graduates or advertise jobs in the state, she said. She turned to her students. Where are our sheets,” she asked, “the class ones and the state ones?” “Everyone is taking a state and a class, we’ll work a discussion of a couple of states into each class,” she told me. “Tuesday,” can Utah, Arizona, and Ohio go?” she asked. The students nodded. “What do we do for this again?” a couple of students asked. “I just want you to Google these states, check out their state websites, things like that, so see what you can find out about how they are trying to retain graduates,” the professor explained. (Fieldnotes, Feb. 2008)

An administrator commented to me that you could really tell the difference between the university class and one of the college classes – “when you walk into [university professor]’s class, he has complete control, and when you walk into [college professor]’s class, it’s total chaos. She has no control over the class”. While the professor clearly

cared for her students, outsiders, like the university administrator, noticed that she did not provide the same level of personal support to her students as the university professor had. Two of the five times I observed the class, the professor was unable to make it, and the students were left to work on their marketing plans themselves.

Figure 8 shows the timeline of the small college marketing class students' activities and documents. They did survey research, conducted the state reports, and went on the city trip with the Generation Now leaders. They also produced a video and several posters for the marketing campaign they presented at the end of semester.

After all the groups of marketing students from the colleges and university finished their final reports they were asked to formally present their marketing plans to a large group from the business community, state government and media at a new theater in the state's capital city. In the next section I describe and analyze this event and evaluate how it was interpreted by the university administrators and media.

Public Reports in the State's Capital

The marketing class projects were to culminate in formal presentations to a gathering of public officials and business leaders from around the state. The presentations were given at a new movie theater in the state's capital city. The theater, according to an administrator, was already known as being "hip," and matched the image that those involved in Generation Now were trying to promote. The administrators worked very hard to organize the event, and sent formal invitations to CEOs, business leaders, state government representatives, and other university staff members. Several newspaper reporters were also invited, as well as a television crew from the local public station who planned to do a segment on Generation Now.

When I entered the theater, its lobby was crowded with students and state leaders, mostly in professional dress. The walls were dark red and black, with black-and-white posters from old movies framed and hung around the lobby, next to posters of the new art-house films that were currently being screen at the theater. The theater had only been open for eight months at the time of the event, and its interior looked new and fresh. People were filtering into the theater, and I went in to find a seat. The room was not large; about one hundred and fifty plush red seats sloped down to the stage and large screen.

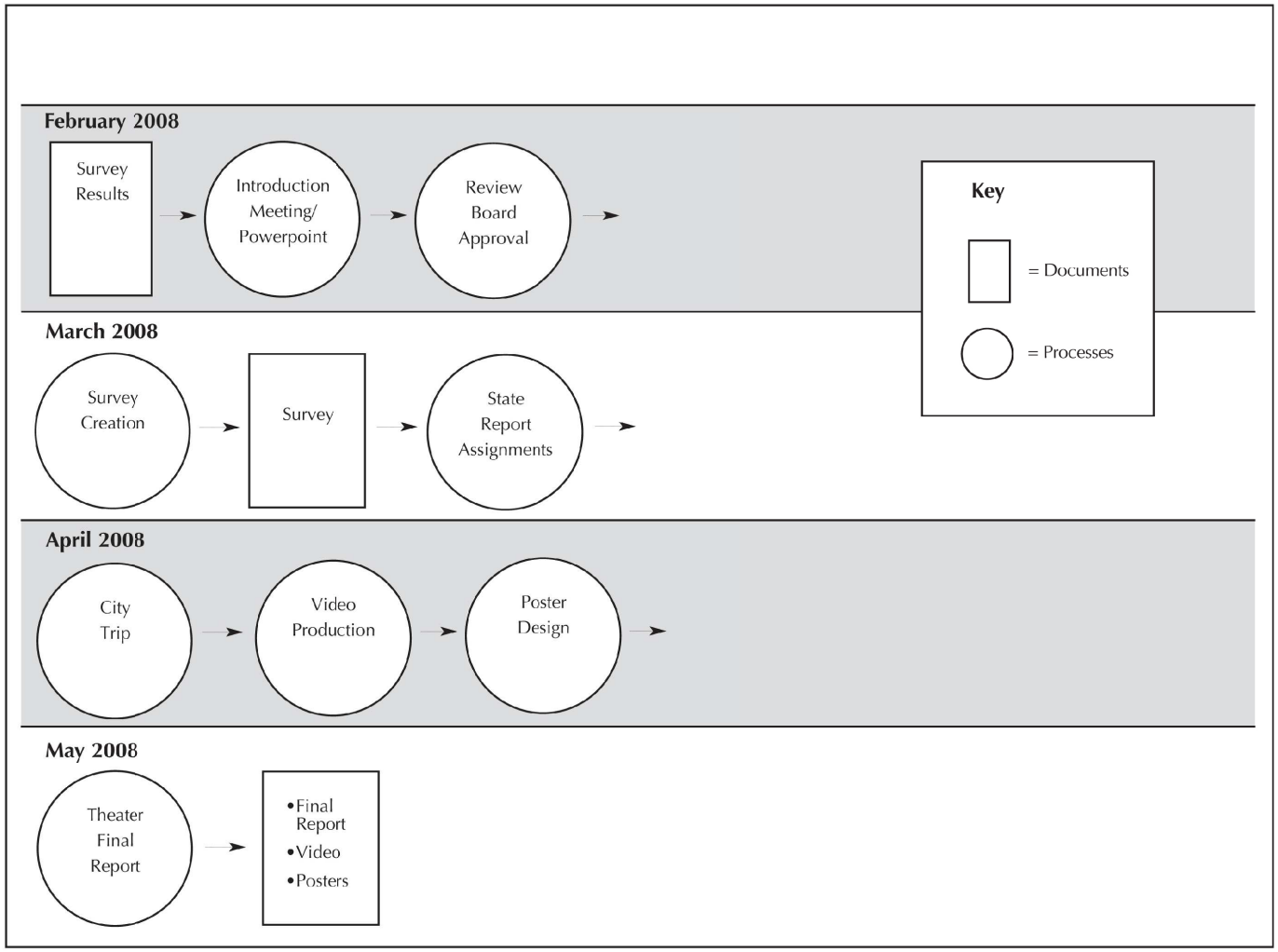
The students sat among the crowd to watch their presentations, and each group would come forward to present at the appropriate time. When everyone was seated, the administrator who founded the initiative got up and spoke.

> We have people here from business, from the governor's office, from the colleges and universities, from major media, and most importantly the students, who have been working on these ideas all semester. We're going to talk about "how can we retain and attract the best and brightest workforce?" (Fieldnotes, May 2008).

The phrase the administrator used, the "best and brightest workforce" was invoked many times in public speeches and documents about Generation Now, underlining how the initiative was particularly interested in the type of young person capable of achieving personal success. The administrator also contextualized the initiative within projects of regional development in other parts of the world with his following words:

> A number of years ago, when I was a graduate student studying in at Trinity

Figure 8: Small College Marketing Class Timeline



> University in Dublin, Ireland, I remember seeing an ad that showed some Irish students and the tagline was "Meet the New Europe." And, since that time, Ireland has become the economic wunderkind of Europe. In this room, we have "The New [name of state]," as well as the establishment, those leaders in business and government and old people like me (laughter in audience). We're here to hear from "The New [name of state]," and we need to listen carefully to them and after they present let's engage in a very good dialogue about our state and what we can offer. (Fieldnotes, May 2008)

Here the administrator invokes not just a regional success story, but the *marketing* of a regional success story. It is the marketing plans that were of interest to Generation Now leaders – what did they look like and how did people respond to them? The university administrators were hoping the students could provide them with some great marketing ideas.

The first group of students to present their marketing plans was, I later found out, perceived to be disorganized. My fieldnotes from the day describe the scene:

> Two men and two women stood on the stage. They said that they were missing one member of their group who hadn't been able to make it. They were all pretty casually dressed; one of the men had long hair and was unshaven, with a wrinkled blue shirt, khakis, and a tie. The other young man was clean-shaven with spiky hair, and was similarly dressed. The women had sweaters and khakis on.
>
> The unshaven man asked everyone in the audience to stand up. He asked how many people in the audience had all the information they wanted about the job opportunities available when they graduated. "If your experience upon graduation

was going to a career center and having a Cinderella story, with little animals and birds singing and helping you get your resume ready and sewing you the right clothes and getting you the right interviews, then please remain standing," he said. Everyone sat down. (Fieldnotes, May 2008)

The students projected a very plain Powerpoint on the huge screen behind them. The slides had a basic background, no images and several spelling mistakes. The tone of cynicism with the college's career center continued throughout the presentation. At one point the unshaven male student took the microphone back and said that they also found that the job fairs were very inconsistent, and the companies who went to them didn't find good candidates at those job fairs. "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results" (Fieldnotes, May 2008), he said.

This presentation was received better than the next one, in which the professor stood up and announced that the next group had been unable to make it to the event. He proceeded to summarize the ideas of the students. I heard several comments afterward about how odd and unprofessional this presentation was.

The third presentation was done by the group that I had observed at a small college. They presented a video they had made of interviews with young professionals around the state describing their careers and lives. An administrator told me later that he thought the video was a great idea, but the quality was too poor to be useful. "I really thought [the small college group] was going to knock it out of the park," he said, and it was "just crap." "Why was it so bad? Why couldn't they have put the camera closer?" (Fieldnotes, May 2008).

These presentations did not compare favorably in the eyes of administrators with the university marketing class that had been so well organized from the beginning of the semester. My fieldnotes describe their presentation:

> The [university] group looked very polished next to the previous two groups. Four of the nine students were up on stage, doing the presentation. All wore dark suits, the two women in skirt suits and heels. Serena and Tracy both have long dark hair they wore straight and long, and the men had freshly gelled hair.
>
> Garth and Serena stood on one side of the stage, and Mel and Tracy on the other. The Powerpoint presentation projected behind them was colorful, with pictures and very polished looking compared to the previous two. They didn't have notes or look back to the screen, they had clearly practiced often and had their points well memorized. The mic pass-offs were smooth without any fumbling or looking questioningly at each other as the previous groups had done. (Fieldnotes, May 2008)

After this presentation, the students were told by a woman who had recently been awarded state CEO of the year that they were very professional, and that they should be very proud of themselves. No such compliments were given to the other groups.

I found out later how uncomfortable the university administrators were with the presentations describing problems with the career centers. Representatives from the career centers were in the audience. An administrator quietly told me later that he wasn't happy with the first two presentations. "They just didn't sit well with me," he said. "They were too negative. [Another administrator] was worried about them, because he felt like they were just bashing the career centers. Well, it was [the state] in the raw" (Fieldnotes, May 2008).

When I saw the same administrator a week later, he and a young professional were discussing the event. “I just wanted to leave when I heard the comment about being hungover,” the administrator said, “I wanted to just disappear. My heart just sank.” The young professional said “someone needs to tell them that it’s not appropriate to make comments like that. I knew the [state capital’s newspaper] was there, and all I could think was, oh no, they just got the nugget they need to debunk this whole thing.” “I know” said the administrator, “but it was [name of reporter], and I knew she wouldn’t do that. She ran a straight piece. [Public television station] will cut that comment out too. The [university] students knew not to make comments like that.” The young professional told the administrator that the students need to be told to go get some inexpensive business clothes at the Gap [retail clothing store]. “There was one girl there,” she said, “wearing the shortest little summer dress with spaghetti straps. It was something I might wear at the beach, or on a cruise. And she kept getting up to get food, and sitting back down. You could just tell that she thought she looked so good” (Fieldnotes, May 2008). In the next section I consider the why the distinctions among the two groups were focused on by state leaders.

Class Differences in the Quest to be Young Professionals

Figure 9 adds to the map of the social relations of young professionals that has been built throughout this research analyses. This chapter shows how college and university professors can be integral to students’ educations regarding “young professionalism.” It also reinforces the role of the state government and established business professionals, who were involved directly in observing the students and making judgments about the students regarding both the content and the style of their presentations.

The two groups of students I observed learned marketing in two distinct ways. The large university marketing class had a small group of students working in a very structured process given to them by a professor who had used that same process in previous semesters with other students. The other class I observed worked in a larger group, and did not have a clear process given to them by the professor. Their classroom, according the administrator who observed their work, seemed very chaotic. This more "chaotic" experience did not appear to be an anomaly in [the state], as the two other groups of marketing students from another small college also seemed disorganized; indeed, one group did not even show up to the presentation.

The local leaders and media representatives at the presentation only saw the final outcome of the projects that had taken the whole semester. From what I heard, while the students were not directly blamed for their unprofessional presentations, neither were the vastly different circumstances of the groups understood or considered. One group had a lot of support from their professor, their parents and their peers, while the other group was operating in a much less structured environment with less support. Both classes had worked all semester on the project, but only one "should be proud of themselves." The state leaders attending the theater presentation were not able to see what I have shown in this chapter – that one group was not prepped and well-prepared and hand-held during the process while the other group was. The end result was that one group – that from the more renowned and expensive large university - appeared harder working, more dedicated and passionate, and more creative than the others.

As described in the previous chapter, university leaders were aware of the pressure on them to provide the employees for the regions's economy. "Let's Keep [the state]'s Best and Brightest" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 2009), the phrase used by the Chancellor at the opening of the theater event for the student marketing presentations, became the initiative's tagline for a time. By

having the students present their plans to a broader audience, the university was able to display some of their "best and brightest" – but in the process, a hierarchy of potential employees – from the polished and the professional, to those that still needed to "work on" themselves, was also displayed. This visible hierarchy corresponded with the well-known statuses of higher educational institutions in the state. Given that a large percentage of the students at the small state colleges are in the first generation of their family to attend college, the theater event can be seen as an example of how difficult it can be for the working classes "to compete with those with significant cultural and social advantages" (Brown 2003: 164).

The advantages of those attending the large university were very likely to continue, as corporate recruiters from elite businesses in the United States tend to hire from a small number of elite universities. As Brown (2003) explains,

> Elitism in education and the job market are mutually reinforcing as top universities report the labor market successes of their students to highlight the value of their credentials, which in turn is justified by the imputed qualities of the students that attend that university. (197)

In this way, "formal educational structures tend to reward the kinds of capital (particularly the cultural capital) possessed by the middle class. Education is, therefore, central to the intergenerational reproduction of social priviledge" (Waters 2009, 1868).

As I show here, the differences I saw between the higher education institutions were not only nominal, but reflected very visibly in the public performance. Those differences could be blamed on the individuals, but I saw in my research how the state university the students had a clear structure, the support of their parents and professors, and they supported each other, sharing valuable knowledge about how to act as a professional.

The students who were more successful were from the more elite state university's business school. The other groups were from the smaller, more rural state colleges, which do not have endowed, prominately named business schools and operate on much smaller budgets. This theater presentation displayed to the local business community that students from one school are more likely to be more successful than students from the others. Those students should be "proud of themselves," as one audience member told them. In the next section I show how the students' projects in their marketing classes were ultimately translated by university leaders into a marketing story that was useful to the initiative.

Presenting the "Best and Brightest": The Real Marketing Plan

Involving the students brought the ruling relations of regional economic competition directly into the classroom, and ultimately, the students' involvement in Generation Now was incorporated into the marketing of the initiative in a manner that coalesced with those ruling relations. As with Generation Now's survey, ideas and voices were solicited and listened to, and then mostly put aside so that only certain kinds of facts and images end up in the final public Generation Now documents.

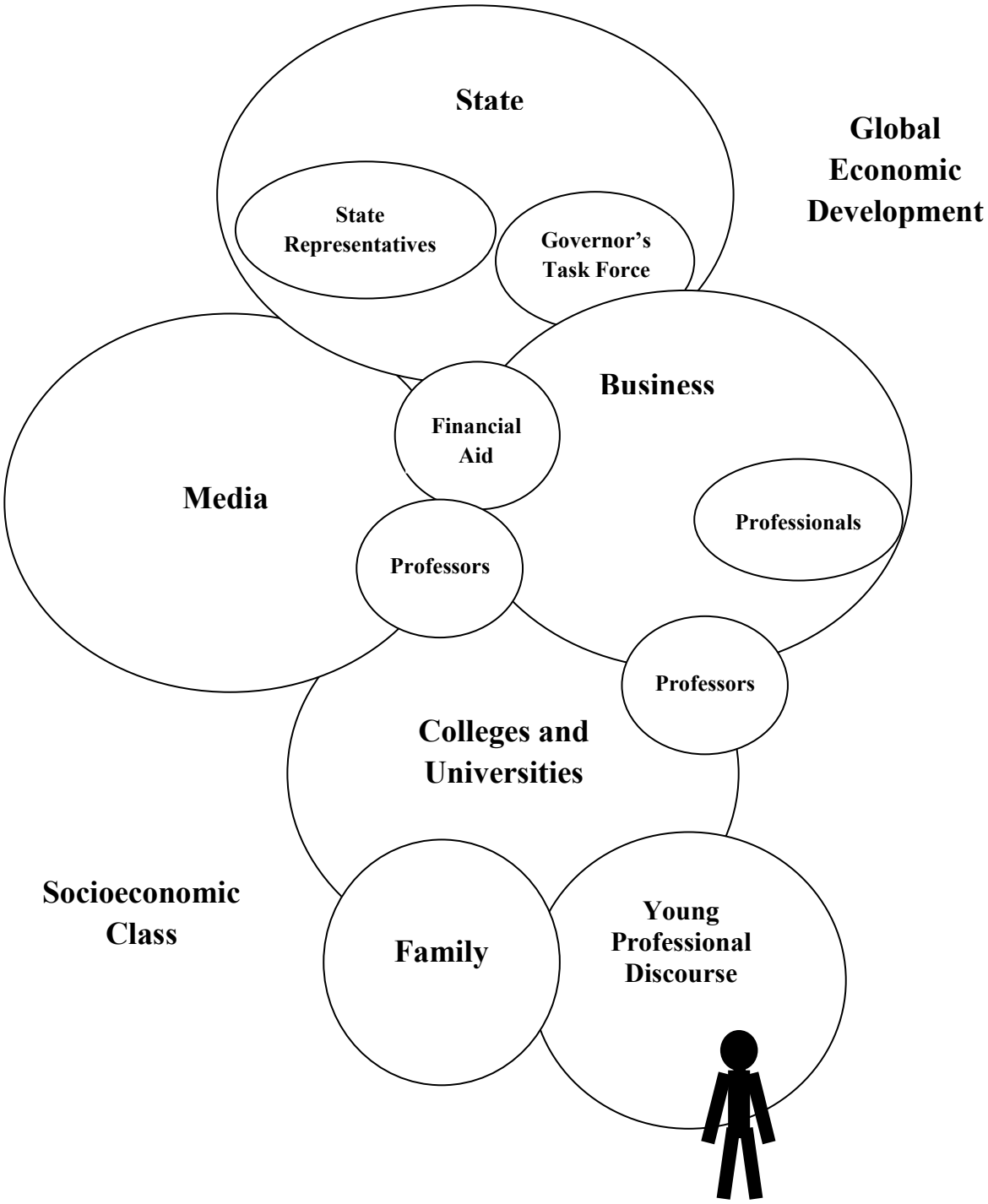
At the theater event in the state capital, an administrator got up after all the presentations from the different marketing students around the state and asked the students to raise their hands. About two-thirds or so of the student in the audience raised their hands. "How many of you changed your opinions about [the state] as a result of this project?" he asked. About half of the students raised their hands. "Was it a positive change or a negative change?" he asked. Some said positive, and I also heard many people say "both." "Positive," said the administrator, "that's great" (Fieldnotes, May 2008). The administrator's perception that the students changed their

impressions of the state for the better became a significant component of the marketing of the initiative.

It was the students themselves, not their ideas, which ultimately became part of the marketing images produced by Generation Now. While the students' input was sought, what they offered did not, for the most part, fit into the marketing documents Generation Now leaders wanted to create. The marketing plan that university leaders envisioned for Generation Now would include images of proactive, career-oriented young students and professionals able to engage in the institutional marketing language being used – not a group of students "complaining about the universities and career centers."

Images of a convinced target market – successful students who would stay in the region - were found among the students who had worked on Generation Now. One anecdote about a student was added into the administrators' PowerPoint presentations. This particular student had been planning to leave the state upon graduation, but after working on the initiative during the course of the semester in his marketing class, he changed his mind and decided to stay. Several other students had also changed their minds, and a slide that mentioned this was inserted into the initiative's official presentations. It was the students and images of their possible futures that became part of the marketing texts. An article in a major newspaper for the New England region described the theater event and one of the students involved:

Figure 9: Young Professionals: A Complex of Relations



> To the state's brain-drain fighters, [student x] is a success story. Before working on a mock marketing campaign to keep [the state's] college graduates in the state, the [small local college] junior was set on moving to California, lured by nightlife and glitz. Now he plans to stay.
>
> "California is more flashy than [the local regions]," said [student x], who grew up in [town x]. "But when it came down it, I realized that everything they offer there is offered here."
>
> All of the groups said much more needs to be done in communicating the [state]'s virtues to younger people — affordable housing (compared to [major city]), safety, the availability of a "metropolitan lifestyle," even good-paying jobs. The power of information in students' hands was such that five of the eighteen students who worked on [the small local college's] thirty-five-member project and had expected to leave the state — including [student x] — changed their minds and decided to stay in [the state] as a result of their research. (Source hidden for confidentiality, May 2008)

The textual practices used by this initiative institutionalized enterprising career actions, reproducing and normalizing images of successful young professionals living and working happily. While there was a myriad of stories that could be told using the students' experiences and work they did with Generation Now, only one (positive, enterprising, career-oriented) understanding of the students and their experiences was ultimately reflected in the Generation Now textual process. More complex stories about the students' "complaints," or their struggles at the smaller, lesser-known colleges, or their difficulties in paying for school or finding a job, did not have a place in the institutionalized reality created by Generation Now.

The students did derive benefits from working with Generation Now and many used their experience working on the initiative to their own advantage. Many were able to use it as an experience they could leverage into a job. One of the students, L., told me that she had used the experience of the marketing class in a "bunch of interviews. They ask about a time when I've had to solve a problem and coordinate a lot of people and resources, and my mind went blank, but then I thought, Oh yeah! Workshop [marketing workshop – the title of the class]" (Fieldnotes, May 2008). Also, as evidenced by their presentation, many students were able to take advantage of the opportunity to express their own frustrations with aspects of attending college or university and looking for a job. They were not passive participants in a project created by university administrators; they used the tools they had to do their own research and make the project useful for their own lives.

Through interviews with human resources managers and data gathered from the labor department, Chapter 7 shows that the job market is complicated and the number of jobs available to young professionals in the state is limited. As the first-generation students and workers I interviewed discussed, the gap is widening between the promises that business and state leaders make about the rewards of higher education and the reality of the job market. .

CHAPTER 7

"YOU CAN'T MARKET YOURSELF OUT OF THAT": THE MISALIGNMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER

Introduction

The previous chapters in this dissertation uncover how the everyday lives of young students and workers are coordinated by the social relations of new careers and young professionalism. This chapter revisits these findings in interviews with business leaders. Like the Generation Now leaders and young students and workers discussed previously, business leaders are enmeshed in the social relations of career. By focusing on this group's perspective, I was able to uncover more of the "workings of translocal ruling relations" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004: 90). As Campbell and Gregor (2004) explain, "Generalizability in institutional ethnography relies on discovery and demonstrating of how ruling relations exist in and across many local settings, organizing the experiences informants talked about" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004: 89).

Throughout the interviews and speeches presented in this chapter, I was interested in uncovering the external logics, or ruling relations, that business leaders were accountable to. I found that the words of the research participants added complexity and depth to the map of social relations already constructed. The participants engaged with the discourse of young professionalism, and those who were hiring professionals indicated an interest in "employable" young workers with the desired educations, skills and personalities. These same participants, however, used some words that indicated they understand the impossibility of meeting their hiring standards given the state of local public education.

Several of the business leaders very clearly indicated their concern with disconnects among local public education – at all levels – and the job and career opportunities available at their organizations and communities. The results of the interviews I conducted support the notion that employers' needs for college-educated young professionals are more complex than Generation Now leaders and others in the state have presumed and offer more insight into the social relations of young professionalism.

Voices from the Community

Data from interviews with two corporate hiring professionals and from talks given by three hiring managers are presented first. These individuals offered a fluctuating and complex picture of the state labor market. While all were looking for more employees, they each faced distinct challenges. Also presented here are data from interviews with two business leaders. One was the head of the state chapter of Society of Human Resources Management who acted as a human resources consultant, and the other was the director of a successful non-profit small business consulting and start-up incubator. Their perspectives were overlapping in some cases, and in others, as I will discuss, conflicting. This complexity reflected, I found, the tensions among ruling relations and actual experiences. They were also concerned with finding the "right" workers.

"For the most part, people are open to it."

In the spring of 2009 I interviewed Allison, a recruiter for a large insurance company. A down economy had decreased the number of new hires needed in Allison's organization, and she explained that with the high unemployment it was fairly easy for her to find strong candidates for her organization.

Allison and her colleagues filled many of the open positions at their company, including entry-level positions, with people from out-of-state. She explained that they targeted a large number of specific colleges and universities for their entry-level hiring, and two of those schools are in-state schools. Her organization sent representatives to interview soon-to-be graduates and to attend job fairs at those schools. Allison said that they required a very high grade point average for hires from the in-state schools, because they are "lower ranked."

> We do have certain target schools that we hire from – those with reputable technology departments, but we post at double or triple that amount of schools. I think we have a good brand at about twenty-four schools, including [two local universities], but we post our job openings at about fifty or sixty schools. It's hard to have a good brand at that many schools.
>
> We do look at Barron's Rankings when we're hiring. If the school is ranked lower, then we want a GPA of 3.8 and above. Many of the [local] schools are lower ranked.

Allison's employer offered coveted entry-level positions to recent college graduates, but the organizations' hiring focused on graduates from higher-ranking out-of-state colleges and universities. Graduates from most of the local, in-state, institutions would need to have high grade point averages to be considered. Allision also explained that, while in past years they typically hired students with many different backgrounds and majors and trained them in the specialized IT skills they would need. In contrast, this year they weren't having problems finding students with the right skills already in place. "Right now we can really nail the resume," she explained, meaning that she and others within her company could find candidates with the exact skills and background they were looking for to fill their open positions. When I asked Allison if

they have trouble attracting new employees to the rural area where her organization was located, she explained:

> More often the answer is no. Students seem to be willing to try new things…We have some possible recruits who have the typical reaction to [the state] being the boonies, and don't want to move here, but for the most part people are open to it. We have a booklet we use to sell [the state], it talks about the benefits of the area, the ocean and the mountains, being close to [several large cities], and also that it's a sales and income tax-free state.

Allison did not have a difficult time attracting employees to her geographic area for the entry-level positions she offered. From her point of view, a marketing campaign to attract more young professionals was not crucial; however Allison's comments about the rankings of local education pointed to a major issue. The quality of education in the state was perceived as low, and many local students might be locked out of local jobs unless their grade point averages were almost perfect.

"It's not about age, it's about skill."

Lauri, the human resources administrator for a large hospital seemed to have a much more challenging job finding employees, as open positions on hospital staffs typically must be filled by individuals with very specialized educations. When I asked Lauri if she was feeling the shortage of young professionals, Lauri explained that when she was searching for a new employee, she focused primarily on finding someone with the required education. Lauri told me:

> It's not about age as much as skill. I think one of the challenges for us as an organization is that there is not—the university system of [New England state] has nursing programs and that sort of thing, but in the medical field, there are

> specialty professions. There's not a lot of that education around. For example, radiation therapies. We have some incredible difficulty in recruitment. Again, there are not a lot of those types of programs around. I don't know that it's necessarily for us a young versus old thing, although I do know that I read about that a lot in the newspaper.

Lauri's knowledge of the need for young professionals came from the media coverage of the aging workforce and need for young workers, which at the point when I interviewed her in 2009, had largely been shaped by press coverage of Generation Now.

When I asked Lauri to tell me more about her hiring needs and how she might be able to find more of the type of workers the hospital was looking for, she said a big concern in the medical industry was getting more people interested in pursuing the specialized degrees the work required. She explained that individuals who have identified that they were headed into the medical field early in their education were the most likely to go onto the post-secondary training they would need, but the state did not offer the specialized education for those jobs. As Lauri stated:

> It's really getting out to the younger people in the high schools and even in the middle schools to be thinking about how do you prepare to be in the medical field, and do you even know about the medical field? … [Our state], just like any other state, has done a great job of identifying the nursing shortage… [however] nurses are one piece of that pie. There's a medical technologist who has to support that care. There's a respiratory therapist who has to support their care. Look at the incidences of cancer amongst older people, so there are radiation therapists and others…the list goes on and on.

Lauri's understanding that people should be encouraged to work in the medical field much earlier in their education pointed to the difficulty of putting the right people into the right jobs when the specialized schooling takes years of preparation and is not available in many regions.

"We should be identifying people in high school."

Along with the interviews, I also attended several symposium workshops that offered chances for business leaders to explain to university leaders and state government officials their difficulties in finding, developing, and retaining workers in their organizations. One symposium was held at a small local state college. The challenge that day was to discuss new ways the college could provide local business leaders with the workers they needed. Several business owners and managers spoke about their hiring challenges to university administrators, government officials, local employers and business professionals. John from [Company A] spoke first.

> My company has one hundred and fifteen people, and plans to double within the next three years. We are dedicated [to the state], and this area is of huge importance in precision engineering, it's a hub for diamond machining from all over the world. We need twenty people right now with a technical education. They need trigonometry, physics. Right now all the businesses in the area are just stealing people from each other. We're going to need twenty more a year from now. We should be identifying people in high school, and putting them into modernized internship programs. We want people to come out of school with academic and practical experience. We're willing to invest in the schools, but there needs to be someone to help facilitate the program.

John, like Lauri, was looking for employees with very specific skills. He also believed that the earlier people could be pointed towards the types of careers his organization offered, the better.

Next Nate, from [Company B] spoke. He was looking for "well-rounded" employees – with the right technical skills and ability to communicate.

> My company builds websites, integrates small businesses with web-based application, and helps companies to prototype ideas. We have ten people in the company, with offices in Miami and Las Vegas. We want to bring business from those areas into [our state]. In general, we need well-rounded students. I don't need people who come out of vocational programs, what I need is basically great geeks who also speak English (laughter from audience.) And I'm not referring to foreign workers, but the difficulty that many geeks have with communication. I need people who can solve business problems and think about bigger goals. Everybody is in sales and customer service today. I want geeks who know accounting, who know marketing.
>
> On the technical side, I want [this local college] to become a technical center, a center for new technology, at the forefront of new Internet technology. It'd be great if the school were nationally known. I'm passionate about the infrastructure of this area. We're at a serious competitive disadvantage with other areas of the country. We need fiberoptics, broadband and wireless throughout this area. The college should be the catalyst for these efforts.

The final speaker on the panel was Mike from [Company C]. He was from a local furniture company, and spoke about the changes he lived through in his industry.

> We build furniture for schools and daycares. We've heavily invested in machinery and lean manufacturing, and foreign competition is our biggest issue right now. A bookcase from China can be half the cost of ours.
>
> We went from one hundred to sixty people. The people we need are not people in flannel and bluejeans running tablesaws, now they use a CNC [computer numerical controlled] machine. We're not looking for two hands and a heartbeat like in the old days. I'm a local, so I've watched the decline in manufacturing in this region, and the decline in the prestige of woodworking. It's seen as dirty and lowpaying now. We're looking for skills, math, computer skills, people who can understand the concepts behind how machinery works, so that when they walk past a smoking drill bit they understand that something is not right.
>
> We also need people who understand green materials, because our customers ask about them, and green processes. We need people who understand safety implications, because the cost of workers comp has tripled in the past three years.
>
> We need graduates who understand marketing, ethical business practices, and have good personal skills. A lot of people come to us who don't know how to interview well, they complain about their last employers. We need people who can be creative, innovative and take initiative.

John, Nate, and Mike all spoke about needing specific kinds of highly employable technical workers and were asking for changes in the local education practices. Again, the hierarchy of higher education facilities is reflected in Nate's words, as he is not looking for people from vocation schools, he wants "good communicators."

The discourse of regional economic development was present in the words of some of these business leaders. They were concerned about their own organizations' success, and they knew that to compete in the global market they needed the advantages of infrastructure such as better broadband access and improved public education.

"You can't market yourself out of that."

In the spring of 2009 I also interviewed Tanya, the director of a non-profit entrepreneurship center in a small city. The center had consultants who worked with local entrepreneurs to help them develop their businesses, and also offered office space for start-up companies. She knew of Generation Now, but was not particularly supportive of its mission. When I asked her if she knew of the initiative Tanya told me:

> I've followed this initiative, too, and I'm not at all convinced that we want college students [to stay after graduation]. I think it's useful for them go to off to the big cities and get other experiences and to bring them back. Have you studied Jane Jacobs and her work at all? Just that idea—I remember one of her ideas was that urban areas—that creativity was a result of—it happens around the edges of different cultures. There are so many cultures and so many different things going along that—but the meeting of those two that creativity happens.
>
> I grew up in [midwestern state] in a rural community. Went to [major east coast metropolis]. Lived there for seven or eight years. I think that sparked my creativity in a way that would never have happened if I hadn't had those two very different experiences….I don't know that it's a great place to be twenty-something, and it depends on who the twenty- something is. We do need opportunity for that, but I think it's not so bad that people go away. The main

question is - are they coming back during their most productive years, and do we have productive capacity to offer them opportunity?

Tanya was particularly concerned with the quality of the public schools in the state.

> I think if people are going to come back, are we giving them an experience, K–12 [kindergarten through twelfth grade], that makes them feel like they're welcome and want to be back? We've got high schools that basically everybody's saying, "We are not pouring money into you guys. You are not worth it." Why would somebody want to return to the community? The first eighteen years wasn't a great experience because they didn't feel like the community valued them. Why would they come back and subject their kids to that?

She connected crumbling public schools to the desire for so many young people to leave the state. A marketing campaign, in Tanya's estimation, was not the answer to convincing more young people to stay in the state.

> …there's talk about changing [our school system], but that hasn't happened. Until [the reality of school and the reality of work] match…you can't market yourself out of that…I think there's a ton of frustration on the part of the business community about what colleges are producing. I think there's some understanding at some levels of those universities that that's the case, but the ability to change in academia is very hard.

Tanya summed up what I had been hearing from local employers – employers' needs were not met by graduates of local colleges – their skills and abilities upon graduation were not the quality or type needed by local employers.

"There's nothing exciting in terms of employment."

Sarah, a human resources consultant, who was the chair of one of the regional branches of the Society for Human Resources Management also agreed to be interviewed. At a time when the Generation Now leaders were expressing their frustration with the "misperception" that there were few jobs in the state, this professional was not at all optimistic about the job prospects for young people in the state.

> They also need to look at the lack of exciting, challenging work here in the state. The manufacturing jobs are gone, there's less information technology work here. There's nothing exciting in terms of employment. We're the retail capital here. There're restaurants and stores, and those are entry-level jobs but there's nowhere to go from there. I've been to two or three conferences in the last year where they talk about the "best employers" in the state – but it's the same four companies every time. They are the only ones in the state that seem to be good to work for that are going to treat you well.

This disappointing picture of employment possibilities in the state is quite different from the vibrant picture of the state's corporate atmosphere painted by Generation Now and other state leaders. I also heard about the high cost of housing from Sarah.

> The cost of living is too high in [the state], and in a lot of other states you don't have to pay as much for housing. I know there are some efforts to develop some affordable housing in the state, but there just seems to be no concerted effort and not enough publicity about the problems in the state.

A region with a poor job market and lack of housing is not an attractive place for workers. Sarah's perspective is one I heard from others as well – the state needed much more than a marketing campaign in order to address its labor market woes.

Disconnects Between Education and Career

The interviews with business leaders add more depth and complexity to connections among social relations mapped in previous chapters. Demonstrated in this chapter are the ways in which young students and workers are being acted upon from the perspective of business professionals, and the discourse of young professionalism shapes our knowledge of the transition from university into the workplace. Also demonstrated here are the ways business professionals use the idea of merit and skills to legitimize existing inequalities, without recognizing the differences in opportunities that exist between socioeconomic classes.

Allison, a human resources representative for a large insurance company, did not indicate that she had a hard time finding employees for her organization, especially during the economic recession of 2009 when we spoke. She did say, however, that many of the local higher education institutions were "lower ranked," which impacted her perceptions of the students as potential entry-level hires. Brown and Hesketh (2003) analyzed the hiring practices of U.S. and U.K. organizations, and explained:

> Employers evaluate credentials according to the reputational capital they attach to the university or department from which they were issued. Leading employers have always targeted elite universities. Recent political sensitivity concerning issues of diversity led them to emphasize a widening of the talent pool from which to make their selection decisions, but the cost of administering vast numbers of applications has led employers to target their recruitment at those

> universities where they are most likely to receive applications from "serious contenders." This has intensified the entry competition to elite universities. (218)

I witnessed differences in the quality of education during the months I spent with students from the high-ranked local large university and a lower-ranked small rural state college. Allison's targeting of specific schools for hiring was not rare; most large corporations used similar tactics. Education quality varies, but as Brown and Hesketh explained, while the value of an elite college or university education has risen or remained stable, the value of an education from a lower-ranked school has decreased.

Lauri, who recruited for a large hospital, and John, Nate and Mike, the employers who spoke at a symposium, were all looking for highly qualified employees. The desired employees needed specific technical skills and customer service or management skills. These hiring demands were in line with the findings of Brown and Hesketh (2004), who found that, even as higher education opportunities have expanded in the United States, hiring managers and recruiters did not feel that their hiring pool had increased.

Sarah's perception that the state was "the retail capital of the world" may be true, and not just for the northeastern United States. Lower-wage jobs in production and service dominate most of the labor market (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), including in New England; no more than thirty percent of all working Americans are in occupations requiring a bachelor's degree (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Evidence shows that in New England, most of the jobs available are in service and production, as Sarah noted when she explained, "we're the retail capital of the world." Uchitelle (2010) wrote:

> For young adults, the prospects in the workplace, even for the college-educated, have rarely been so bleak. Apart from the 14 percent who are unemployed and

> seeking work…23 percent are not even seeking a job, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The total, 37 percent, is the highest in more than three decades and a rate reminiscent of the 1930s.
>
> The college-educated among these young adults are better off. But nearly 17 percent are either unemployed or not seeking work, a record level (although some are in graduate school). The unemployment rate for college-educated young adults, 5.5 percent, is nearly double what it was on the eve of the Great Recession, in 2007, and the highest level — by almost two percentage points — since the bureau started to keep records in 1994 for those with at least four years of college. (219)

Interviewees Lauri and Tanya linked the problems in higher education to a need to improve high school education and to connect students to careers much earlier in their lives. In her research, Goyette (2008) found that while many career opportunities do not require a four-year college degree, high school students were not being made aware of opportunities that require a less expensive two-year vocational degree.

> Contemporary high schools are not structured to meet the needs of students who may be well-matched to stable jobs that do not require college degrees. There are fewer vocational courses offerings and tracks, with most highs schools expanding their college preparatory and even more elite streams, like honors and Advanced Placement. High school guidance counselors do not connect students with occupational opportunities that do not require bachelor's degrees, so students who might benefit from these options are instead encouraged to create paths to four-year colleges. (Goyette, 2008: 462-463)

The focus on higher education has marginalized the possibilities for careers that do not require a four-year college education.

Despite the evidence that there are not endless possibilities for social mobility and successful careers for anyone who goes to college and works hard enough, a growing number of young people continue to go into debt to pay for their college degrees. Not only are students perhaps paying heavily for degrees that don't guarantee career success, higher education may be amplifying existing class differences and helping to widen the income gap. Goyette (2008) explained:

> Even if students' increasing expectations of a bachelor's degree lead them to enroll in four-year colleges in greater proportions, there are many other ways that higher education serves to stratify students. It is possible that as access to college increases for all students, inequality in educational and occupational outcomes by social background may be maintained through the type and purpose of the post-secondary institution a student attends. (477)

The interviews with local employers and other business leaders showed that, as Tanya expressed, there are disconnects between education and problems in the state that cannot be solved through marketing.

Generation Now, the effort to keep more young professionals in a Northeastern state after graduating from college, was driven by the assumption that organizations and regions need to compete with other organizations and regions to attract and retain young workers who are in extremely high demand. Corporate managers and consultants have bolstered the demand for young professionals through claims that they are in constant need of new and better employees. Management gurus including consultants at McKinsey, a top American consulting firm, have

defined the "war for talent" as one of the most important management issues of the past several decades (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). As Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod (2001) explained,

> There are three fundamental forces fueling the war for talent: the irreversible shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, the intensifying demand for high-caliber managerial talent, and the growing propensity for people to switch from one company to another. Since these structural forces show no sign of abating, we believe the war for managerial talent will be a defining feature of the business landscape for many years to come. (3)

While organizations have ramped up their abilities to attract and retain elite employees, regional leaders have also invested heavily in the war for talent, bringing in cultural activities and state-of-the-art technology and creating marketing plans that showcase their geographic region. Individual students and workers are pulled into the competition. Budding young professionals (and their parents) make huge personal investments into education and go into debt to pay for college educations. As students and young workers they work incredibly hard to make and keep themselves employable.

While many leaders and individuals take the perceived increasing need for young professionals for granted, others are questioning the logic of focusing on developing more and more college-educated knowledge workers. Brown and Hesketh (2004), for example, argued that the need for college-educated knowledge workers has been exaggerated. The focus on developing appropriate employability skills of the workforce, they explained, needs to be tempered by research on the actual demand for knowledge workers and the way organizations use their capabilities. Most workers do not need a college education according to Brown and

Hesketh, who explain “For every individual with the title manager in the US economy, there are another four workers who are either making the product or serving you with it” (42). Other research adds to their evidence. Pryor and Schaffer (1999) found “the number of jobs requiring a university education is increasing at a slower rate than those who have the commensurate education” (30), and Goyette’s (2008) research suggested that perceptions of higher education are changing – as four-year higher education degrees become the norm, the perceived value of a four-year degree is decreasing.

Although the business leaders whose words are presented here hope for improved education structures within the state, they also must know that the tax structure of the state does not allow for extra funds for major changes to public education. In fact, many businesses are established in the state because of its low taxes and “favorable” business climate. Ultimately it is “better” workers with particular backgrounds, skills and personalities that they desire. Previous chapters have shown how difficult it can be for young students and workers to navigate the discourse of new careers. This chapter shows how that discourse penetrates the business community. Even though employers feel the lack of state support for their organizations, employees, and co-residents, what they are ultimately asking for is continual improvement in individual performance.

CHAPTER 8

REFLECTING ON THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CAREER

Introduction

My interest in careers developed during my own transition from college into a career in human resources as a recruiter. It was a stressful process for me; one that, at many times, felt random and chaotic. In my new career where my primary responsibility was finding candidates for open positions in my organization, I met many others who were also embarking on new jobs. I couldn't help but wonder about their paths as well as mine – how did we all end up in our jobs, our new life paths? Moving into scholarly research on careers and career transitions has given me a chance to reflect on those years and think about how my own actions were coordinated by ruling relations in the late 1990s. Upon reflection, I see that I was negotiating competing notions of career success, partly feeling as though I should engage work that would directly make use of my major in Latin American Studies, but also feeling as though I should take advantage of the "new economy" that was, ostensibly, making so many of my peers wealthy. I chose to try the high-tech corporate world. Jobs seemed plentiful, and building a young professional career was, I think, easier than it is today. That world was for me, however, never comfortable.

During this dissertation research project my interest in entry-level careers was deepened through another personal career transformation – into a teacher at the college level. Throughout the research and writing of this dissertation I have also been teaching management students at two different public higher education institutions. Most of the students I've taught to date have graduated from college during a serious economic recession, and my concern for them has

increased my sense of urgency in understanding the economic structures and social pressures they face as they begin their careers.

My research demonstrates that the discourses of new careers and young professionalism coordinate individuals' actions and exacerbate existing inequities. Institutional ethnographic methods were used to trace the direct connections among everyday lives and the ruling relations of career and regional economic development. The study presented here helps to fill a gap in the career research and puts careers into external contexts (Gunz et al., 2008; Khapova & Arthur, 2008; Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007). Existing contextual careers research often focuses on the organization as the context for career. Lawrence and Tolbert (2007), for example invoke the idea of 'opportunity structure,' which for them "refers to the set of probabilities that individuals with given attributes will gain access to career-related rewards" (402). Career related rewards, in their model, include "formal recognition, such as promotions, salary, and benefits, as well as less formal rewards, such as public acknowledgement, selection for important committees, or assignment to critical tasks and responsibilities" (Lawrence & Tolbert, 2007: 402). The institutional ethnographic framework used here adopts a very different notion of context. Here, I start from people and their actual experiences and trace outwards, far beyond organizational "boundaries." Opportunity structure, in my understanding, looks at the advantages and limitations placed on individuals through translocal relations of ruling to which they are accountable. This research questions the beneficence of management, and ultimately uncovers consequences of the discourse of new careers that are felt in particular by those from lower socioeconomic strata.

Generation Now Update

As I write this, it is not yet apparent whether Generation Now has achieved its stated goal and had a measurable impact on retaining more college graduates in the state. However, as the original university initiative morphed into a separate non-profit organization, it has become clear that something meaningful has been accomplished. Although the funds were never generated, establishing Generation Now was, in many ways, a savvy decision. The university administrators were under tremendous pressure to bring more funds into their school, and Generation Now provided a potential avenue for this to happen. Because of Generation Now, there is now a greater public presence of the *existing* local young professional community and more public discourse depicting the state as a place where young professionals can successfully build careers and have a "hip lifestyle." While this may be a positive change for those who already have local careers, the heightened awareness of the qualities of "employability" has made life more stressful and difficult for those who do not fit into the discourse. There are structural inequities built into contemporary career models that are not being addressed by leaders in the state. In this dissertation, I used institutional ethnographic methods to start from the experiences young students and workers and map the social relations surrounding them. This mapping process has made apparent the difficulties caused by the socioeconomic inequities ignored by careers discourse and left out of the young professional discourse perpetuated by Generation Now.

As has been discussed in this dissertation, contemporary successful careers involve much more than a job; they also include a particular lifestyle that incorporates working on your career while off the job. The new career framework and discourse naturalizes the idea that those who are successful are harder workers and more passionate than those who are less successful. People who are having a more difficult time building a successful career are blamed for their struggles.

Generation Now has achieved what it was intended to do, in that the university has gained a presence in the state, and it has given those who are already successful greater media presence and more opportunities to network, but has not offered real change for those who are still struggling.

The launch party for Generation Now as a new non-profit and website that I attended in the fall of 2010 was billed as a networking event. "Bring your business cards," the invitation read. The attendees of the party were successful young professionals: university administrators, board members of Generation Now, leaders of young professionals' networks around the state, and members of the governor's task force on young worker retention that had recommended to the Governor that he support Generation Now, and the media. As with the public chamber of commerce meetings I had observed several years prior when Generation Now was being launched, representatives from the entire complex of social relations depicted in Figure 1 were in one room.

The purpose of the event was to celebrate the region and the efforts to change its image: from farming and industrial economy into a place where young professionals would want to live and work. Shifting the image of the state is crucial for a state whose leaders need to grow the state's economy and compete in a global market, and for individuals who need to compete in a global career market. But, as this dissertation has shown, the marketing of the young professional class and lifestyle has hidden many of the complexities of being a young student or worker in the state. The differences in access to education, knowledge of professional culture created by socioeconomic class structure are not acknowledged by young professional discourse. The language of young professionalism ultimately strengthens the barriers to entry into the young professional class.

The website for Generation Now is now live and continually updates with new job opportunities and activities for young professionals in the state. On the website one can find an explanation of Generation Now and its goals.

> The goal of [Generation Now] is to expose more young people to the advantages of remaining in or returning to [the state]. The overall effort builds off the work of the [university] and partnering organizations that established [Generation Now] in 2007. This effort set a goal of encouraging more the new graduates to stay in the state.
>
> [Generation Now] was established as a nonprofit organization in April 2009 to further the original initiative, support and advance several recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force on Young Worker Retention in the spring of 2009, and serve as an independent organization to run a website and associated marketing effort geared at providing comprehensive information on what [the state] can offer to the 20-30 year old demographic in terms of staying, working, and playing here.
>
> [Generation Now] was incorporated by the heads of five prominent statewide organizations…It is governed by a Board of Directors that includes representation from the five incorporating organizations, several of the state's young professionals' networks, and the task force.
>
> The primary focus for the organization for 2010 is the development and launch of the [Generation Now] web site... Designed as a destination site for the 20-30 year old market, this website will include robust content, links to employment tools and opportunities, and social marketing tools and services.

These words reflect the goals of the initiative outlined by Generation Now leaders in their previous white paper and presentations to the public. In all of these documents, read by many people in multiple locations, young professionals are presented as consumers making careful career choices, rather than as embodied workers navigating complex social and economic terrain.

At the Generation Now launch party, I spoke to one young woman (a small "hero" from Figure 1) who was struggling to find a job or an internship. Dressed in a long dress, she looked out of place among the many dark suits. Karla was a student at the local community college who would soon graduate with a degree in computer science. "I'm looking for either a job or an internship at this point," she told me, "something in web design or production; I'm trying to get my foot in the door." Karla told me she'd been looking for months, and hadn't found anything yet. Together, we spoke to the new director of Generation Now, Dayna. Dayna apologized and said she didn't know of any jobs or internships that would be appropriate for Karla. I caught up with Karla at the end of the evening, and she seemed disappointed she hadn't been able to learn about an appropriate job or internship, but she told me that she was hopeful that she would find something once she had her degree in hand.

I felt for Karla, as I knew she was a technical school student, and I had seen throughout my research the difficulties graduates from non-elite higher education institutions can face when trying to start a career locally. In my research, I had "taken the side of" young students and workers. As I mapped the complex of social relations connected together by Generation Now, I had found they were often in trying situations. In a time when social protections such as unemployment, unions, and social security are being dismantled, I had found that the young professional career discourse being promoted by Generation Now can strengthen structures of

inequality. Although Karla did not have an elite education, she was accountable to the same discourse of young professionalism as her more privileged peers.

Summary of Findings

The story of Generation Now is reflective of similar efforts in other regions, as many areas are trying to attract young workers in order to grow and compete in the global economy. The image of the state has been impacted by Generation Now. This study has shown, however, that while the university initiative appears to have strengthened the image of the university and the state, stories of complexity and struggle are left out of the marketing campaign with negative consequences for those who are in the most need of university and state resources.

The figure presented first in Chapter 3 and used throughout this dissertation depicts a young student embedded within the social relations of young professionalism. This dissertation has shown that socioeconomic background, reinforced through college education is instrumental for career experiences. This is not recognized, however, within the discourse of young professionalism, as was shown throughout the presentation of data from interviews and observations of young students and workers, Generation Now and business leaders.

Ultimately, the marketing plan that university leaders envisioned for Generation Now would include images of proactive, career-oriented young students and professionals able to engage in the global economy. For many, however, the lived reality of career remains quite distinct from idealized images of young professional careers and lifestyle. This is because of differences in the education processes, as seen here in the distinctions between a larger university business school marketing class and a smaller college marketing class. One group of students had the resources and support to successfully present themselves as young professionals, while another group of students did not. Data from first-generation college students who were

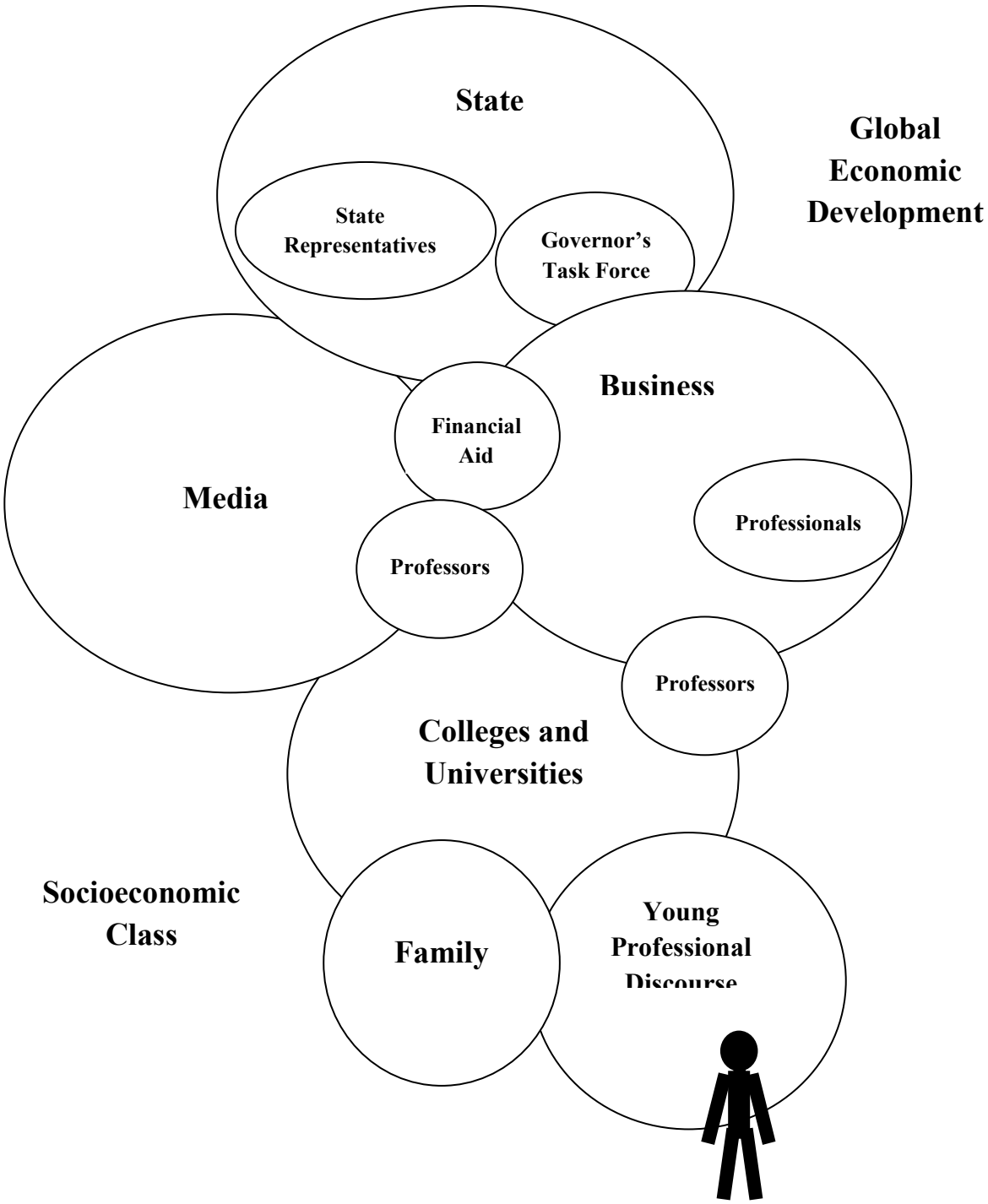
struggling with the notion of going to college and finding a career also supports the fact that becoming a young professional is an expensive, stressful process for many – one that may not pay off. Interviews with business leaders around the state show that the promises of job opportunities for young professionals may be overblown.

Implications for Career Research

Previous research in the field of critical management studies has identified ways in which new careers act as discursive control mechanisms. This study extends that research by uncovering how the subjectivity of young professionalism is formed, starting from young workers and students themselves – current and future young professionals. Institutional ethnography, the research approach adopted in this dissertation, recognizes that people are not just objects of particular discourses, but they actively practice multiple discourses at once. Institutional ethnographers are first and foremost interested in understanding people and their everyday lives, and how those lives are shaped by external social relations. By starting from people themselves, institutional ethnographers can uncover how they actually enact the worlds they inhabit.

This project starts from the everyday lives of people, specifically the students and young workers who were the targets of a university initiative to retain more college graduates in a small state in New England and traces specific connections between their lives and the neoliberal projects of economic development. Like other critical careers research, I find in this study that there is a dark side to "new careers," and that for many, the struggle to build a "new career" is a huge burden. The same discourse is causing these difficulties, also hides them by turning

Figure 10: Young Professionals: A Complex of Relations



attention to individuals and how everyone must "work on themselves," rather than the need for improved public services.

Existing career scholarship has provided frameworks for understanding how careers are experienced in the new global economy. While these frameworks have been built upon distinct theoretical models, there is agreement among career scholars that successful careers are built on self-managing behavior. I have discussed in this dissertation how young professionals are, in many ways, the ideal embodiment of enterprising new career actors. The young professional discourse presents us with a class of young workers who are well educated, in charge of their own careers, making positive impacts on their organizations, committed to their communities, and helping to grow the global economy. Despite this, and the growing importance of young professionals' networks in communities around the United States, there is very little careers research specifically focused on young professionals and their careers.

This research shows how the careers of young professionals are deeply intertwined with place and governmental practices. As the state had the goals of economic growth, a specific kind of worker is needed. This dissertation uses institutional ethnography to show how young professional careers have become important because of regional needs for particular kinds of workers. In contrast to career research based on psychological models, this research ties individual actions to larger social relations, not through the abstract notions of different "levels" of analysis, but rather through institutional ethnographic tracing of actual actions and texts. The relations of ruling surrounding competitive economic growth drive individual careers, in part, through textual marketing efforts like Generation Now.

This research study presented in this dissertation was longitudinal, observing efforts to impact careers over several years. This kind of research is relatively rare in career scholarship. I was able to see how broad discussions about careers and the lives of young professionals were narrowed into marketing messages. The interview data illustrates the 'disconnects' between official discourses of career and how individuals experience their own educations and occupations. While the discourse of young professionalism is highly positive, the work that goes into achieving and sustaining young professional status can be very difficult and expensive. These difficulties are caused by structural inequities in governmental processes and educational structures, but are hidden. As a result, structural systematic problems are blamed on individuals, existing class structures are solidified, and income inequality is exacerbated.

Since 2005, income inequality in the United States continues to grow, and wages are becoming more and more unequal (Noah, 2010). Career scholars need to understand how career practices are contributing to this inequality. While this particular initiative is situated in one locality, the textual practices and career discourses that coordinated this initiative are translocal. Other processes of competitive regional development might unfold differently; the coordination processes, however, derive from similar relations of competitive economic development.

The kind of textual practice that shapes everyday action through ruling social relations is becoming more prevalent (Smith, 2005). While definitions of appropriate behavior and career success are coordinated by external relations, part of being enterprising citizens and workers means that we internalize the demands that these relations have placed on us. "For if career is a matter of personal choice and lifestyle, we only have ourselves to blame for not getting on" (Fournier, 1998: 62). The pressure to work harder, do more and succeed seems to be put on us by ourselves.

Implications for Universities: Who Are We Working For?

My research included a semester-long study of marketing classes at two distinct higher education institutions. This segment of my research shows how education processes can differ greatly even when the classes have the same assignment. These differences ultimately are reflected most on the students as they present themselves to the public. Those who attend more elite institutions are still not immune to debt and extreme stress when finding a job, however, particularly in times of economic recession.

This dissertation offers some critique of universities and their efforts to engage in regional economic competition, but it also acknowledges how the administrators themselves must contend with translocal ruling relations and the reality of the scarcity of resources offered to most public higher education facilities. As budgets grow smaller, working conditions for professors, lecturers, and other higher education employees are more and more challenging. Furthermore, as shown in this research, classroom conditions have material consequences for students and how they are perceived by professional communities. Thus it is important to recognize the "opportunity structures" or "opportunity traps" (Brown, 2003) young workers contend with are not consequences of the students' individual actions, but rather resulting from patterns of social relations.

This research demonstrates a need to continue reexamining the roles my peers and I, university professors and writers, play as participants in the work of co-creating the textual practices of career and being a 'young professional.' As we prepare students for careers as college-educated young professionals, we become important conduits in the "stretch" of strategic management discourse (Greckhamer, 2010). Our primary work has become to provide regions and organizations with the kinds of workers needed to be competitive in the global market. This

dissertation research, in many ways, shows a continuing need to reexamine the work that we do with the intention of serving our students. In our quests to educate and prepare our students for the 'real world,' who, exactly, are we ultimately assisting most?

Students are facing the growing reality that their college educations are not a guarantee of upper economic mobility, or even security. Growing competitive regions are providing economic opportunities for some segments of the population but not others. The interviews I conducted with first-generation students and workers indicated that some are frustrated with these widening inequalities. Higher education is seen now primarily as a private investment, rather than a public good (Brown & Hesketh, 2004) and the investments do not seem to be paying off for many. If this continues it is likely that many students will choose not to make those investments and find alternative paths after completing their secondary educations.

Going Forward

There are many positive aspects to the work done with Generation Now, particularly insofar as it was an attempt to support a diverse and vibrant local population. Furthermore, the regional young professionals' organizations around the state are connecting young workers to their communities in some interesting ways, including through community service and serving on city governments. It seems to be clear, however, that there is much that needs to be done to improve the transition into career for young workers.

Regions are much more than vehicles of economic growth; they are where we must live – not just work. Many scholars and activists are already exploring ways to extricate our regions from the "battleground" of regional economic development that seems to be an increasingly unsustainable war. Beechler and Woodward (2009), for example, call for a new approach to the "talent war," claiming that we need a "new more evolutionary program" (273). The traditional,

highly competitive model of fighting for talent, they argue, puts leaders and managers in a mindset of scarcity and fear. A more cooperative model will allow for more inclusive programs of attracting and retaining the best workers. Furthermore, activists are demonstrating that regions are successful venues for bringing about change by shifting structures of inequality (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009).

In an alternate world, where universities are not under such pressure to generate revenue, Generation Now could have been conceived of quite differently. It could perhaps have been an effort to engage in real, in-depth research about university students. It could also have focused on developing apprenticeship programs, such as those found in many European nations, which are funded by state revenue and the hiring corporations and directly connect students to employers. Comprehensive efforts like these were, however, impossible given the lack of funding that is currently directed towards higher education in the United States.

While establishing more equitable and effective structural links between students and their future careers is currently not possible, we can immediately make changes in the career discourse we use on university campuses. This research has shown, not only that careers result from social relations, but also the negative consequences of the prevalent enterprising career discourse, which gives credit (and blame) for career progress (or lack thereof) primarily to individual initiative rather than external forces. Along with other critical management research, a more holistic, critical understanding of careers can be brought into management classrooms to give students an understanding of the very real structural inequities that may pose constraints on their careers. Over time, with more concerted public support, structures of higher education may shift.

A stream of research inquiry into young professionals, an increasingly desired form of worker, has been opened up through this dissertation research. The interview research I conducted was only a component of my overall study, much more research is needed on young professionals and their everyday experiences. In particular, studies that uncover the gender and race dynamics of young professionalism are needed. While this dissertation has uncovered some of the specific problems caused by differences in socioeconomic class, it has not addressed other forms of inequality that are certainly embedded in a discourse that centers on socially constructed notions of "the best and the brightest."

APPENDIX

FIELDWORK AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Event	**Date**
Radio Talk Shows discussing Generation Now	
Radio Show	Feb. 2, 2007
Radio Show	Apr. 10, 2007
Negotiating Access	
Initial meeting with Higher Education Administrator	Mar. 26, 2007
Phone meeting with Higher Education Administrator	Mar. 30, 2007
Public Meetings where Generation Now was presented to community	
City Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Meeting	Apr. 12, 2007
City Chamber of Commerce Breakfast	May 17, 2007
State Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Meeting	Sept. 11, 2007
State Human Resources Annual Conference	May 6, 2008
Business for Social Responsibility Annual Conference	May 15, 2008

Generation Now Organizational Meetings	
Various phone calls coordinate survey	Aug. 20-Sept. 30
Phone meeting with Administrator	Aug. 10, 2007
Phone meeting with Administrator	Sept. 26, 2007
Meeting with Administrator	Oct., 30, 2007
Meeting with Administrator and Demographer	Nov. 7, 2007
Meeting with Administrators	Nov. 9, 2007
Meeting with Administrator and Survey Analyst	Nov. 15, 2007
Meeting with Administrator and Marketing Professors	Jan. 3, 2008
Meeting with Administrators	Apr. 7, 2008
Meeting with Administrator and representatives from two marketing companies	May 29, 2008
Meeting with Administrator	July, 29, 2008
Meeting with Administrator and marketing representatives	Aug. 19, 2008
Senior Marketing Class Observations	
Observation of Marketing Classes Tuesdays/Thursdays	January 2008 – May 2008
Trip to Urban Center	February 15, 2008
Final Presentation of marketing student projects	May 2, 2008

Governor's Task Force Meetings	
Meeting	May 9, 2008
Meeting	June 7, 2008
Meeting	Oct. 10, 2008
Meeting	Feb. 13, 2009
First-Generation Interviews	
Meeting with Admissions Director	Aug. 20, 2008
Participant Interview	Aug. 30, 2008
Participant Interview	Sept. 10, 2008
Participant Interview	Sept. 13, 2008
Participant Interview	Oct. 3, 2008
Participant Interview	Oct. 17, 2008
Participant Interview	Nov. 18, 2008
Participant Interview	Nov. 20, 2008
Focus Group	Oct. 2, 2008
Focus Group	Oct. 16, 2008
Focus Group	Oct. 29, 2008
Focus Group	Nov. 1, 2008
Participant Interview (follow-up)	June 29, 2009
Participant Interview (follow-up)	Oct. 3, 2009

Business Leader Interviews	
Small Business Workshop	Mar. 28, 2008
Participant Interview	Apr. 29, 2009
Participant Interview	May 2, 2009
Participant Interview	May 27, 2009
Participant Interview	June 1, 2009
Participant Interview	June 15, 2009
Participant Interview	July 2, 2009
Follow-Up Events	
Generation Now Launch Party	Oct. 10, 2010

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